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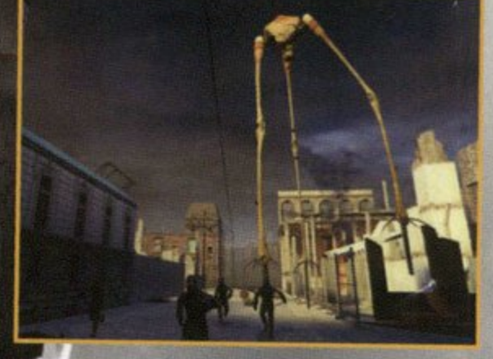

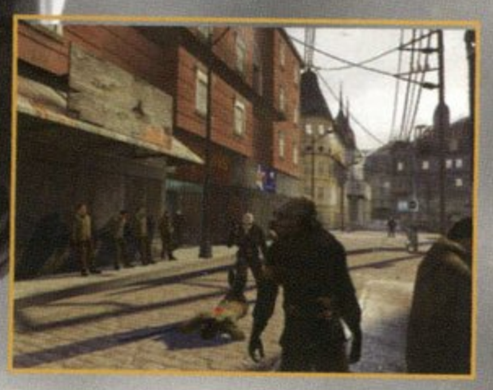

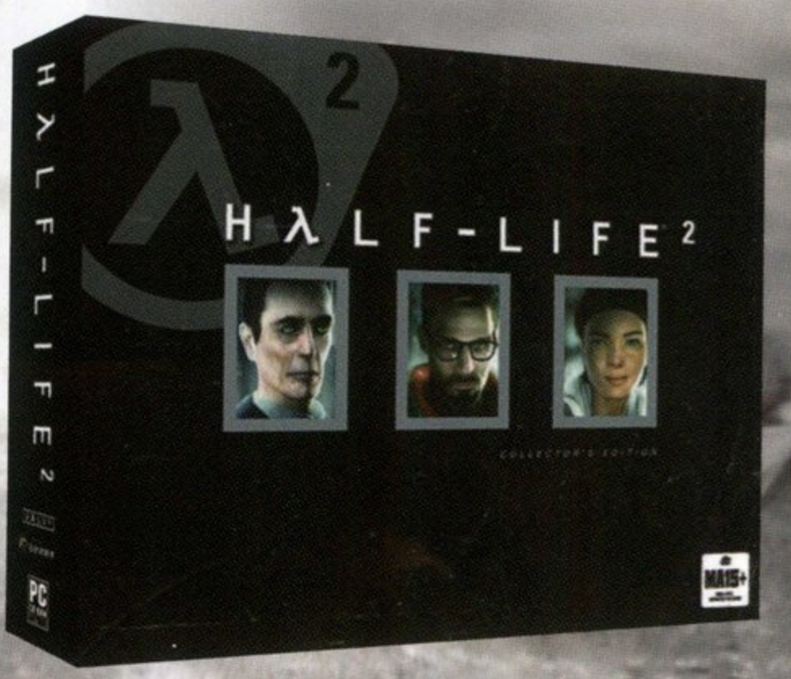

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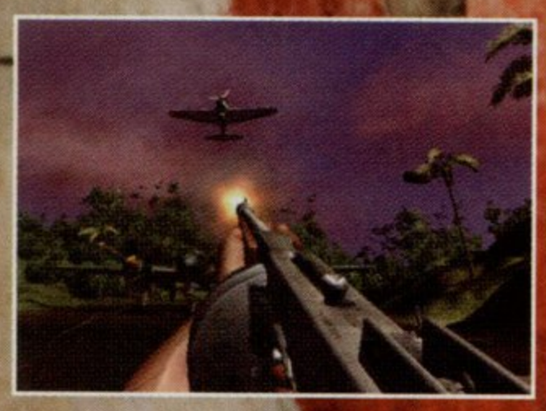

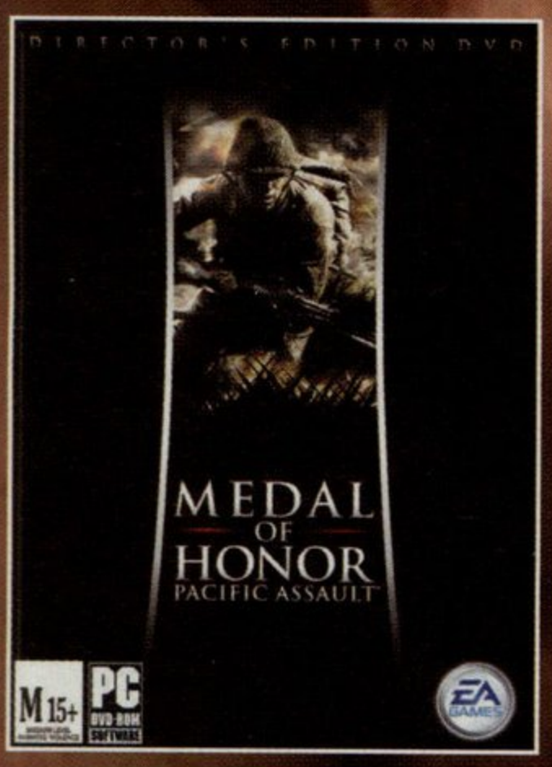

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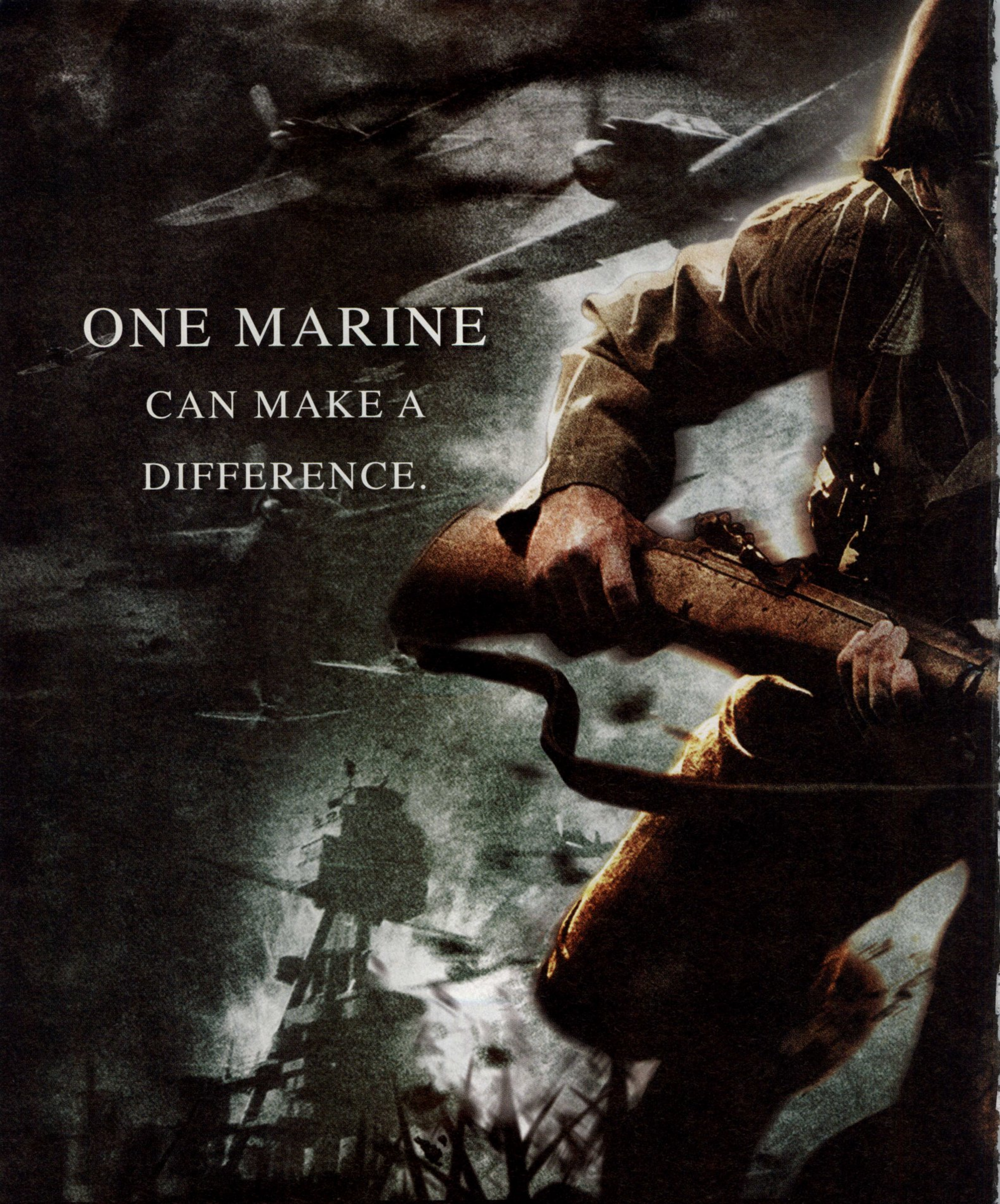

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DERWENT HOWARD

This month, we've been...

GOING TO HELL...
...and back. Or is that back to Hell? Who cares? There's a *Doom 3* Exapnsion on the way!

QUITE FORCEFUL...
...about getting our hands on Knights of the Old Republic 2 so we can share it with you.

COMPLETELY WOWED...
...and you will be too once you start exploring the *World of Warcraft*. Blizzard haven't just entered the MMORPG genre successfully, they've redefined it in stunning fashion!

BATTLING AWAY...
...in Middle-Earth. Gorgeous it is, but is it a preciousssssss piece of gaming goodnessssss?

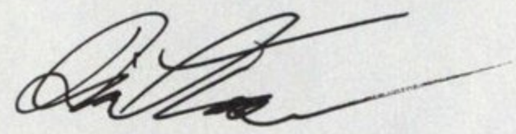
GETTING SERIOUS...
...about how much we love Sam. While waiting for the sequel, we took a walk down memory lane.

End of the golden age?

It's been more than a good year in PC gaming, it's been one of the best, if not the best ever. Some might say that's a bold, or even stupid call, but looking back over the past twelve months, I don't really see what's wrong with that statement. Perhaps that's because recalling gaming history in lumps like that is all but futile, but it all stands to reason too - Videogames have surpassed movies and music as the most lucrative entertainment industry in the world, and that means there's more money behind gaming than ever before.

Think about what we've seen. *Doom 3* redefined what can be done with a 3D gaming engine. *Half-Life 2* redefined what we expect from a FPS in terms of content and involvement. *Rome: Total War* redefined the strategy game by nailing both real-time and turn-based gaming in the one bundle. *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* redefined management gaming, proving the genre works in 3D. Now, Blizzard have proven that MMORPG gaming doesn't have to be limited to those with too much spare time on their hands with *World of Warcraft*.

Perhaps I should calm down, we're now at the end of what has been a very good year, and all the quality comes in a rush just before Santa does - The gold rush is surely all but over for a while now. As for calming down though, I'm really not sure that's possible, as now I've got an even larger pile of good games to lock myself away with. I'll be hard to get a hold of, unless you're on the Lightbringer server of *World of Warcraft*. I'm the Night Elf Hunter with the long hair and the big grin...



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EDITOR

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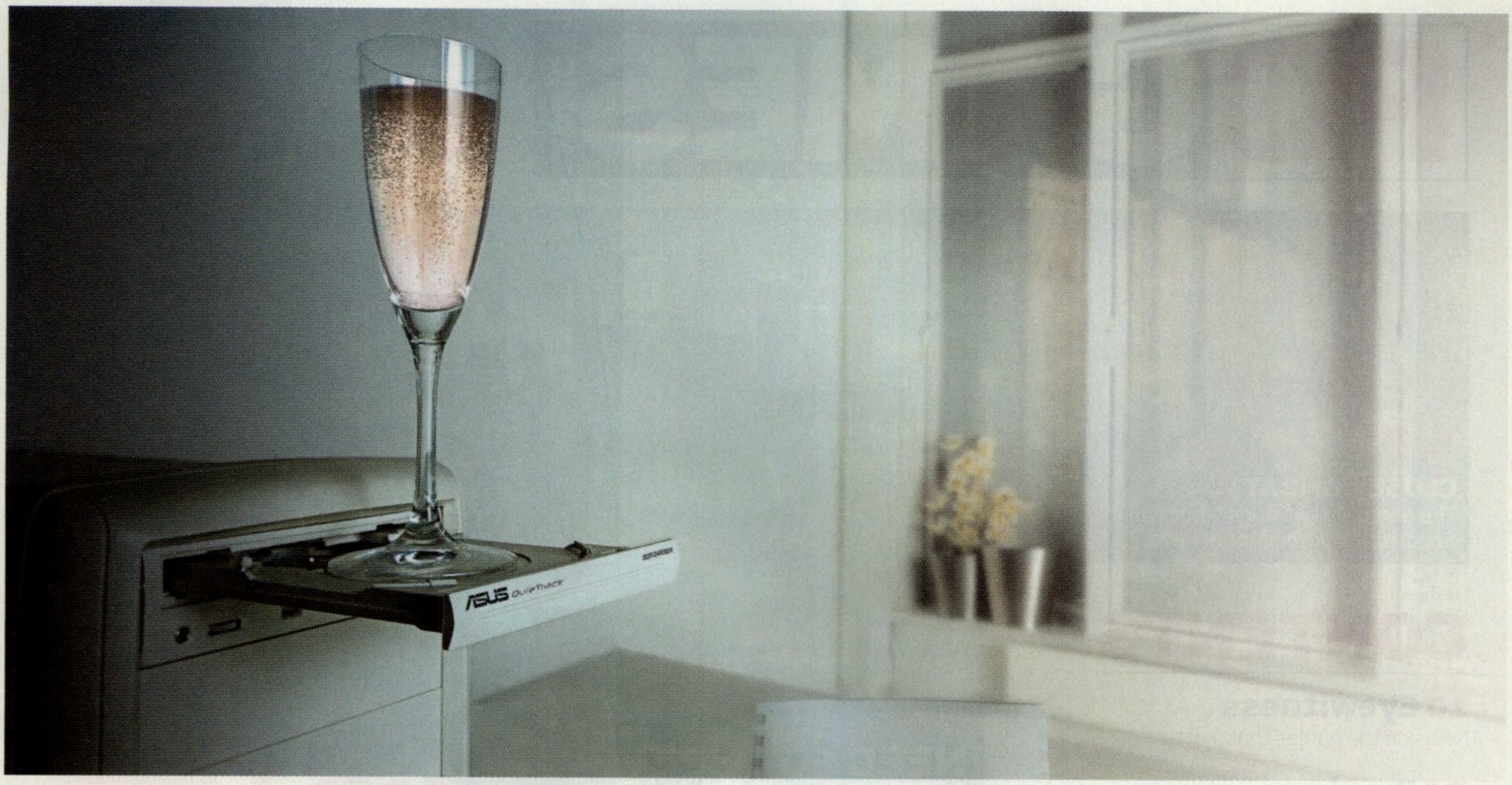


Fast Drives ≠ Noisy Drives

ASUS Developed the World's Quietest Drives

The rise of multimedia and entertainment applications has moved PCs into the living room. They now include functions such as Dolby Digital surround sound, opti fiber output, wireless networking and powerful video performance, turning them into the centerpiece of home entertainment. Unfortunately, increased functionalities and performance also come with the baggage of loud system noise.

Motors are the main sources of noise. Hard drives, cooling fans, power supplies and optical drives all need motors to operate, meaning before you can fully enjoy the latest blockbuster or hot new CD, you'll need to resolve this noise issue.

Disc rotation speeds in the latest optical drives can reach up to 66m/s, roughly the same as a 240km/s hurricane. The fast airflow and motor vibration combined can raise operation acoustics up to 50dB in most drives. It could get very annoying when you are trying to concentrate on work or listen to some tunes.

ASUS, a leading provider of high-performance optical drives, has introduced the QuieTrack Optical Drive series which, as the name suggests provides a quiet, distraction-free environment. According to recent reviews by hardware testing websites, competing CD-RWs produce 4 times as much as an ASUS CD-RW drive, while competing CD-ROM drives produce 6 times the noise of ASUS CD-ROM drives. QuieTrack Series incorporated two advanced features:

Airflow Field Modification (AFFM):

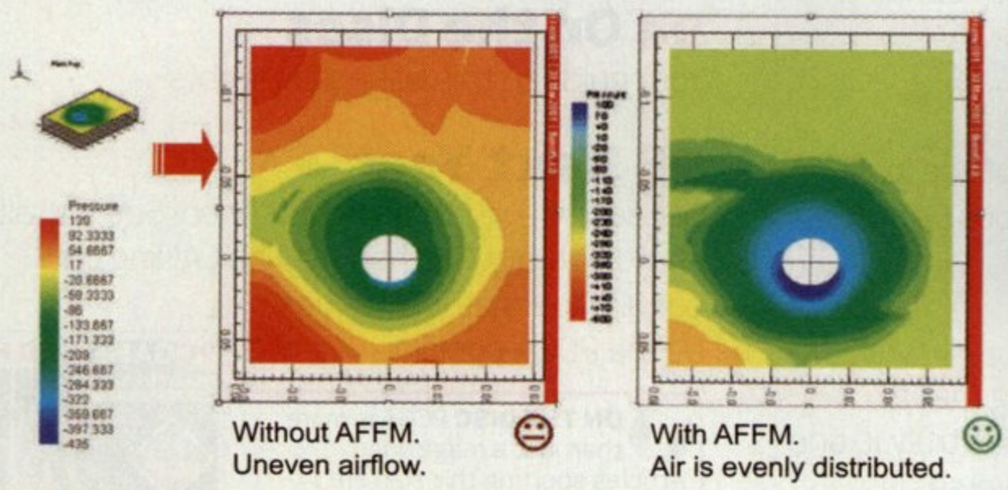
Noise and vibration are two major headaches users encounter when using a high-speed drive. AFFM is designed to change the uneven airflow field inside the drive because balance pressure distribution leads to quieter and more stable operation.

Double Dynamic Suspension System II (DDSSII):

The cutting-edge technology is designed to minimize vibration caused by spindle motors, components and PC cases. The patented DDSSII stabilizes the pick-up head, both horizontally and vertically, achieving more precise tracking while reducing vibration and noise caused by high-revolution motors.

Besides the two unique features, every component of QuieTrack drives is selected with providing peace and quiet in mind. With ASUS QuieTrack, high performance no longer equals noise pollution.

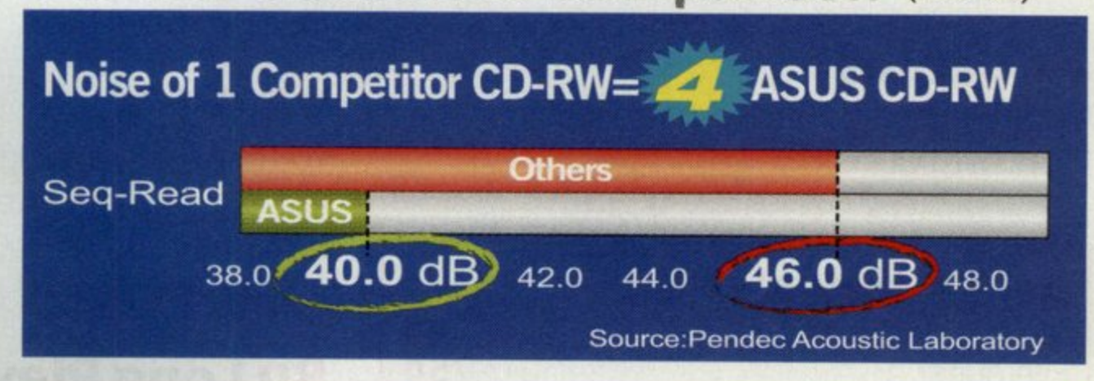
Airflow inside ASUS optical drives



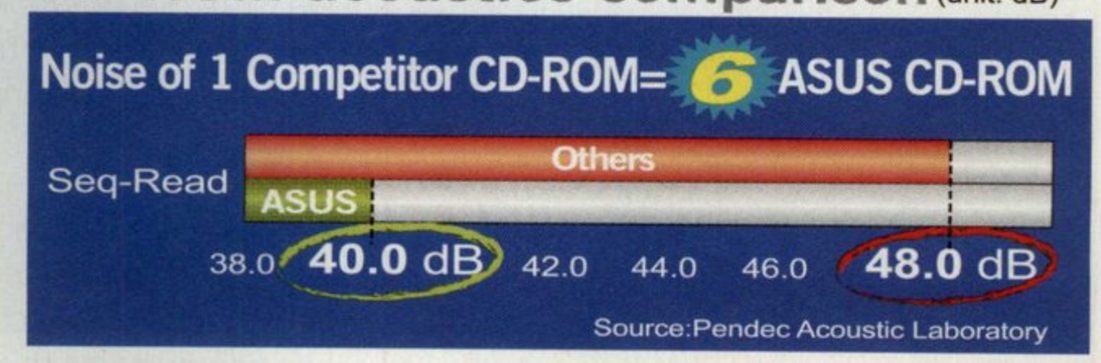
Without AFFM.
Uneven airflow.

With AFFM.
Air is evenly distributed.

CD-RW acoustics comparison (unit: dB)



CD-ROM acoustics comparison (unit: dB)



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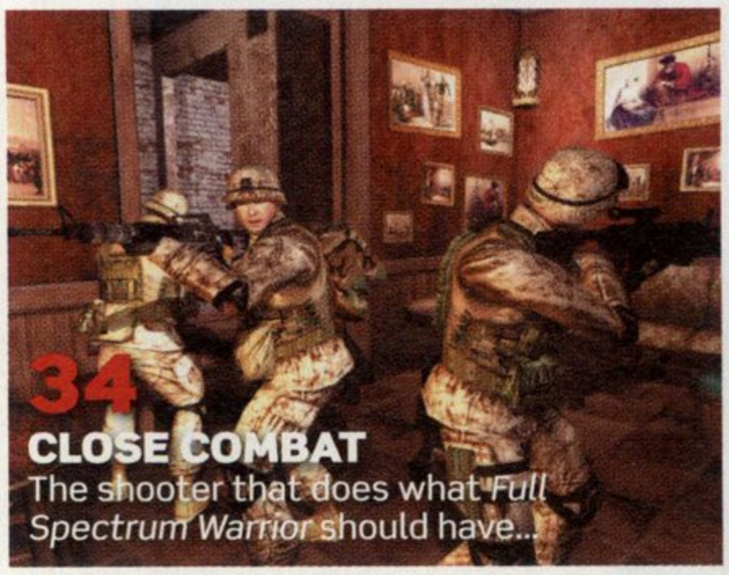

34 CLOSE COMBAT
The shooter that does what *Full Spectrum Warrior* should have...

60 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2
Guaranteed packed with spoilers! Boom-tish. Now stop looking at that girl and read the review.

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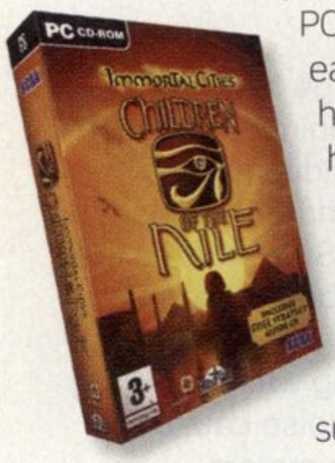

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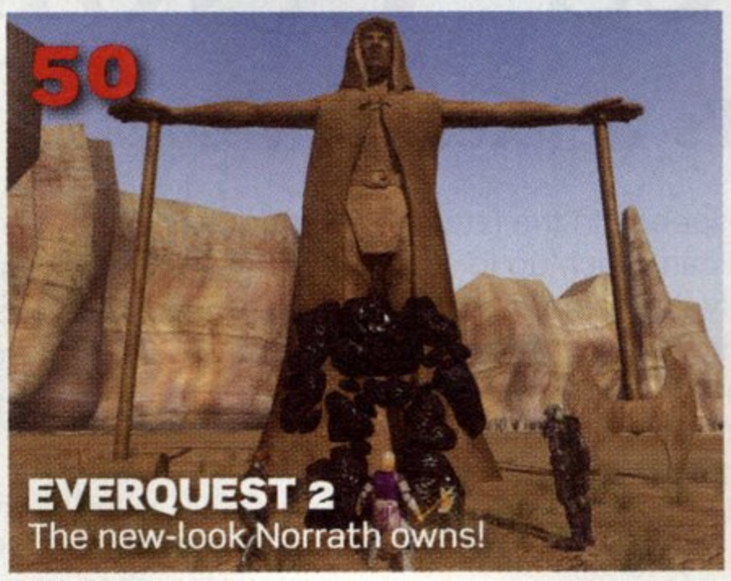

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Celebrating the last update, ever

EXTRA-LIFE

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Got a chronic case of... Well, got a chronic case? Learn how to pick the right home for your gaming beast.

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92 Play Faster
How to tackle problems caused by Microsoft's latest 'problem fixer' Service Pack 2. Configure the new firewall and more.

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Your guide to this issue's highlights.

98 Next Year
Because we're not back until then! See you all early February. Till then we'll be LANing on banana lounges with babes by the PCGA poolside... Or not.

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YOUR MOST WANTED

Latest info on the games *you* want

1 HALO 2 SEEPING OUT

Proof, if it were ever needed, that we're all gamers at heart. An Xbox game that hasn't even been confirmed for the PC sits atop your Most Wanted list. To be fair, it *is* only a matter of time. We have the first *Halo*, and it was always supposed to be ours anyway. But we'll be letting Microsoft know of your interest.

The twin daemons of tragedy and elation dominate the *Halo 2* story this month. On October 14, the French version of *Halo 2* was leaked to the internet. Usergroups and torrent sites soon had the code ready for download. The source of the leak is still unknown. Bungie, to their credit, didn't take refuge in the fingers-in-ears policy that a lot of the industry uses, and asked the community for help. We'll have to wait and see if any is forthcoming - holding your breath?

Bungie unleash the Mark IV software-leak detector from its catacomb beneath Paris.

"I learnt everything I know from David Blaine."

"Pah. Zug balance on one leg long time. It easy."

Better news: *Halo 2* is the most pre-ordered game ever. Over 1.5 million pre-orders were taken for the release. If you calculate an average of $99 per sale, you get 148 million dollars, with 104,000 copies sold in Australia in the first ten days.. That's a bigger opening day than any Hollywood movie has ever made.

Official ETA Nothing so far
We say November 2005

2 SPLINTER CELL 3 CALL YOUR MP

Another game that's slipped, this time into the vague, murky shadows of "Q1 2005" as the men in suits like to call it. In an effort to appease those of us who were hoping to find Sam Fisher in our stockings this Christmas (so to speak), Ubisoft have let slip some multiplayer details.

ess

New single-*Cell* lifeform spotted...

First up, after some initial worry, the Versus mode will return to the multiplayer. There was some fear that it would be dropped for the co-operative mode, but rather appropriately, the two exist side-by-side. The Versus mode will be stealing some moves from the co-op mode, so that spies can work together and heft one another to higher ground. Ubisoft's high-tech hide-and-seek between third-person spies and first-person mercs is evolving into a beautiful, if niche, component of the *Splinter Cell* games.

The co-op mode itself is looking as exciting as ever. Two players join up online and help each other through the missions. It's just like the single-player, but far more social. The only new bit of information released is something called the 'knife challenge mode'. Until our own spies report back with more information, we can only guess: perhaps a knives-only setting? What is clear is that such innovations in the co-op mode bode well for the rest of the game.

Official ETA Early 2005
We say March

"You know, it's really hard to slip through their defences like a phantom when you keep doing that, Steve."

The world of *Stalker* is an unusually dynamic one...

"This week, I shall be mostly stalking Britney."

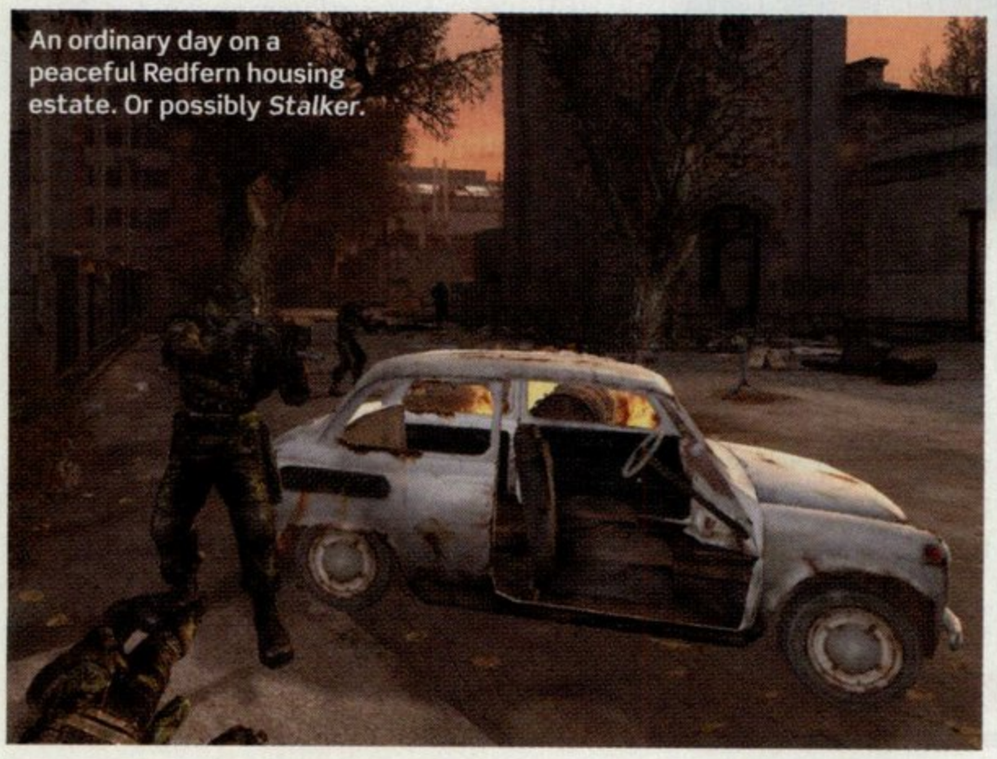
3 STALKER THE BANANA PEEL EFFECT

We'll have to wait until the middle of next year to play GSC's Chernobyl-based mutant shooter. The game's essentially finished, with the world and objects in place, but the AI, a crucial element in a game such as this, still needs to be thoroughly tested.

Why is good AI so important? Well, the world of *Stalker: Shadow of Chernobyl* is unusually dynamic one. As soon as the game kicks off, 100 of your fellow Stalkers begin scouring the radioactive zone for artefacts. It's a truly 'living' world, and that takes a lot of work to code: GSC are attempting to bring the experience of an MMO to the singleplayer game. It's the robustness of the AI behind these NPCs that they need to test. Every game should be different, but every game should *work*, too.

Remarkably, THQ aren't putting any pressure on the team to finish the game. They're allowing the developers the time to make *Stalker* the game it can be, and considering it's the game that everyone in the office wants to play after *Half-Life 2*, that can only be a good thing.

Official ETA May 2005
We say Let's hope so



An ordinary day on a peaceful Redfern housing estate. Or possibly *Stalker*.

WIN A GAME

MY MOST WANTED

Register your excitement!

The Most Wanted chart is voted for by the PCGA readership. Every issue we compile your votes for the upcoming games you're most excited about and then hunt down the very latest news, screenshots and insider information we can uncover. On top of helping us help you, the voter with the best reason for their number #1 choice wins a game!

MY TOP FIVE MOST WANTED GAMES:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Name _____

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In 25 words, what's best about your #1 game?

_____

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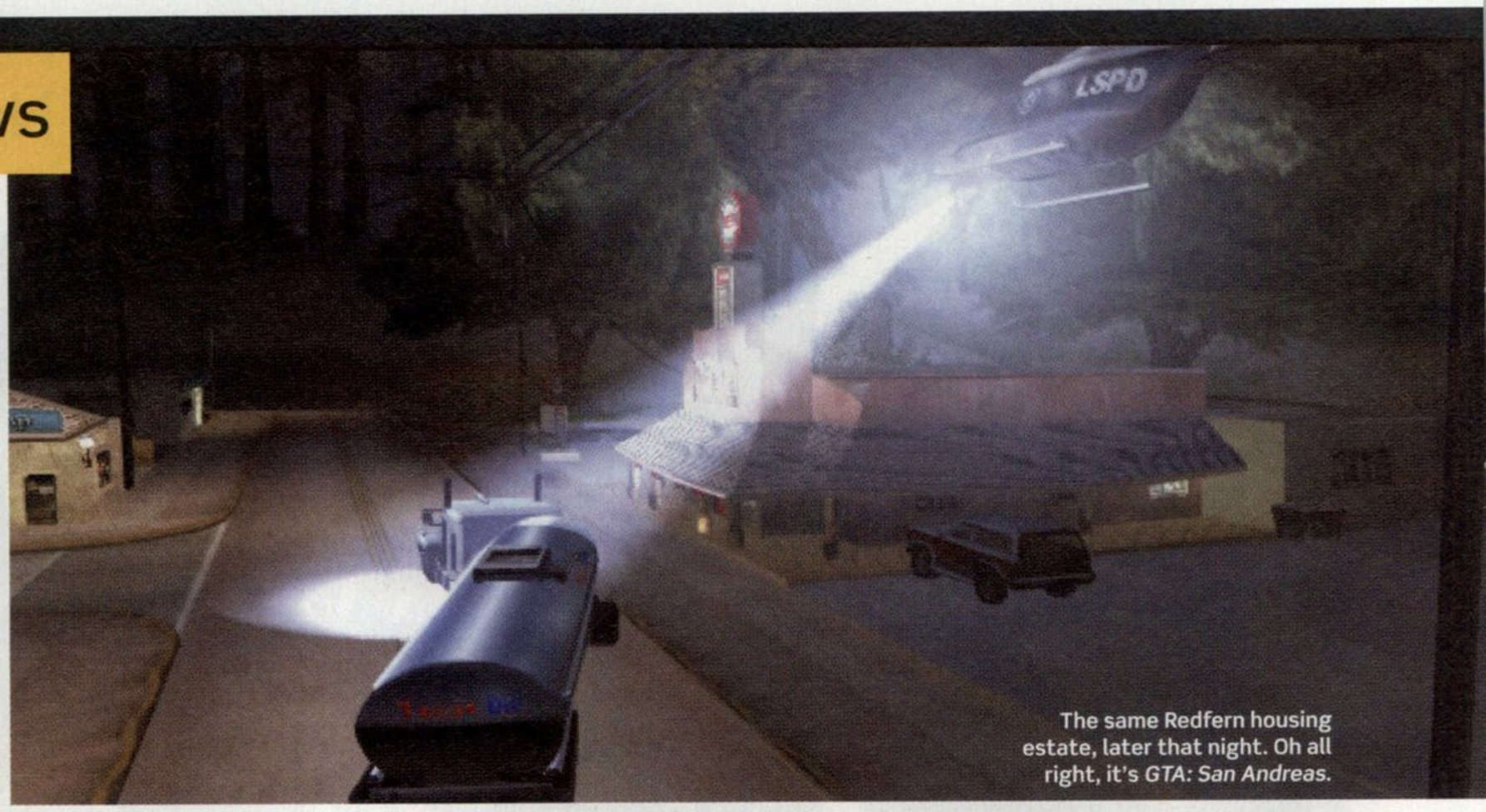
YOUR 10 MOST WANTED



The same Redfern housing estate, later that night. Oh all right, it's *GTA: San Andreas*.

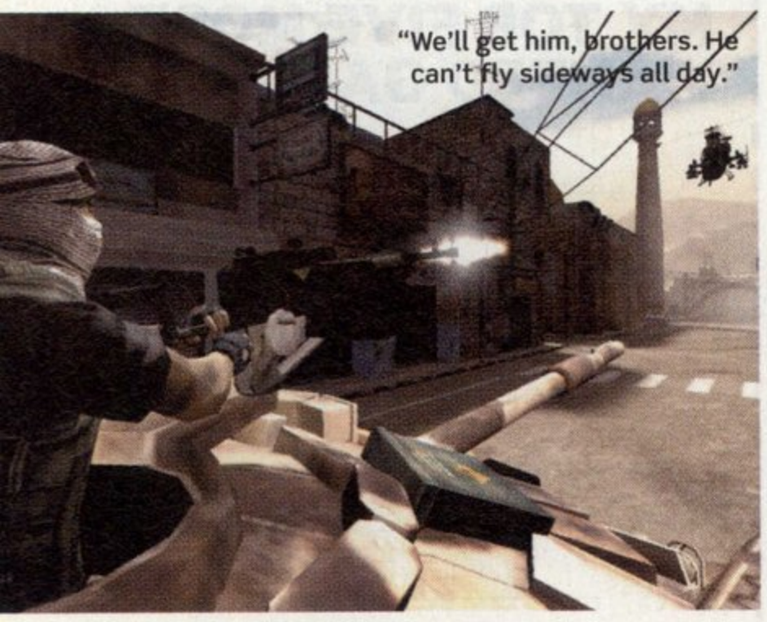
4 BATTLEFIELD 2 HOLY BROWN STUFF

On our DVD there's a new *Battlefield 2* trailer. It provoked exclamations of "Oh. My. God", from anyone who sat down and watched it. Here's why. It begins with a MMO modern-day war scene. Jets flit around the periphery of the map, tanks, choppers and soldiers defend bases from bad guys.

The chopper is beautifully modelled. One of those war beasts where the doors are left open for the gunners to hang out and drill innocent rice farmers. The camera cuts to the jet. A missile drops from the jet's wing, then takes flight straight for the chopper.

The chopper is sideways on to the missile. The missile goes straight in one door and straight out of the other, passing right through in an instant that must have been particularly interesting for anyone who happened to be in the chopper at the time. Go watch.

Official ETA March 2005
We say So far so good


"We'll get him, brothers. He can't fly sideways all day."

5 GTA: SAN ANDREAS RADIO DADA

GTA: San Andreas has got Axl freaking Rose. The gruff, reclusive Guns 'n' Roses frontman hosts the game's classic rock radio station K-DST as Tommy 'The Nightmare' Smith. It shows you just how frighteningly powerful the *GTA* name has become: developers Rockstar can get a real rockstar, and one of the most unreachable people in the business, to lend his voice to it. Craig nearly bought a PS2 when he heard the news.

If that's not enough to get you twitchy, Public Enemy's abrasive lyric mangler Chuck D also makes an appearance. He hosts classic hip-hop station Playback FM as DJ Forth Right MC.

If you can wait, the PC version will be out by the middle of 2005. Until then, why not buy the soundtrack to whet your appetite – it'll be available as an eight disc set, or a two disc compilation.

Official ETA May 2005
We say On target

6 F.E.A.R FREEMAN FOLLOWERS

One of the many memorable things about *Half-Life* was the transparency of Freeman as a player character. No words were put in his mouth, no cut-scene demanded that he behave in a particular way. *F.E.A.R*, we're told, runs on the same wavelength. The character you control is a cipher for your own actions. His personality and approach are all down to you.

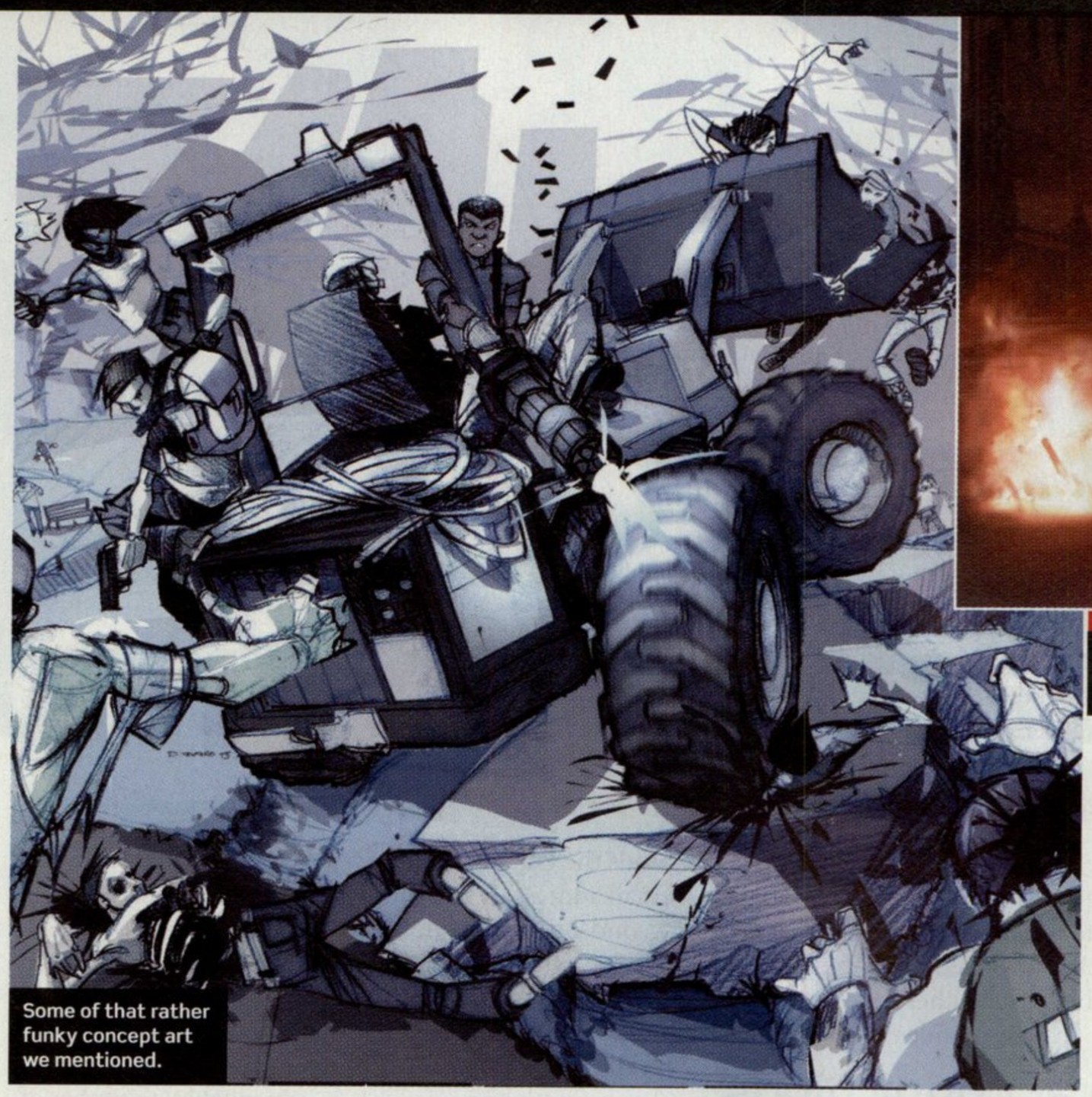
We've also heard an interesting couple of gobbets of info on the support characters in your recon team. The sniper, Sun-Kwon, has superlative hearing and can pinpoint exactly where a person or threat is with just her ears. And Holiday, the demolitions expert, has psychic abilities. He can read events just by

YOUR MOST WANTED CHART

Console-ation gaming

Bungie's truly epic sci-fi FPS, *Halo*, is returning to Xbox this month, and gamers around the world are salivating at the thought. Even PC gamers. We all want it for our own systems. Do the right thing and announce it, Microsoft. *F.E.A.R.* has come back to haunt us for another month, and *Battlefield 2* is also starting to make a regular play for a chart position. And you've made the PCGA crew bust a gut this month, suggesting not only that Valve are going to announce *Half-Life 3* in a hurry, and more hysterically, that they'd have anything to share.

POSITION	GAME WANTED	VOTE SHARE	ETA
1 (5)	*Halo 2*	18%	2005
2 (9)	*Splinter Cell 3: Chaos Theory*	14%	March 2005
3 RE	*Stalker*	14%	May 2005
4 RE	*Battlefield 2*	11%	March 2005
5 (6)	*GTA: San Andreas*	10%	May 2005
6 NEW	*F.E.A.R.*	10%	Early 2005
7 RE	*The Movies*	8%	2005
8 NEW	*Ghost Recon 2*	8%	Spring 2005
9 NEW	*Brothers in Arms*	3%	February 2005
10 RE	*Vampire: Bloodlines*	1%	Out now
NEAR MISS	*Half-Life 3*	1%	Maybe 2007?



Some of that rather funky concept art we mentioned.

ONE TO WATCH

CITY OF THE DEAD

■ **Publisher** TBC ■ **Developer** Mercury Steam

Inspired by George Romero, helped along by American McGee, developed by *Scrapland*'s Mercury Steam. *City of the Dead* has a lot going on for it. So far, not much more has been revealed. All we know is that it's being pitched as the 'goriest game ever', and that it has some of the sexiest concept art we've ever seen. Not a lot to go on, but we're going with a zombie-based, survival of the fittest deal.

touching objects. It's details like these that suggest *F.E.A.R.* will have no run-of-the-mill script.

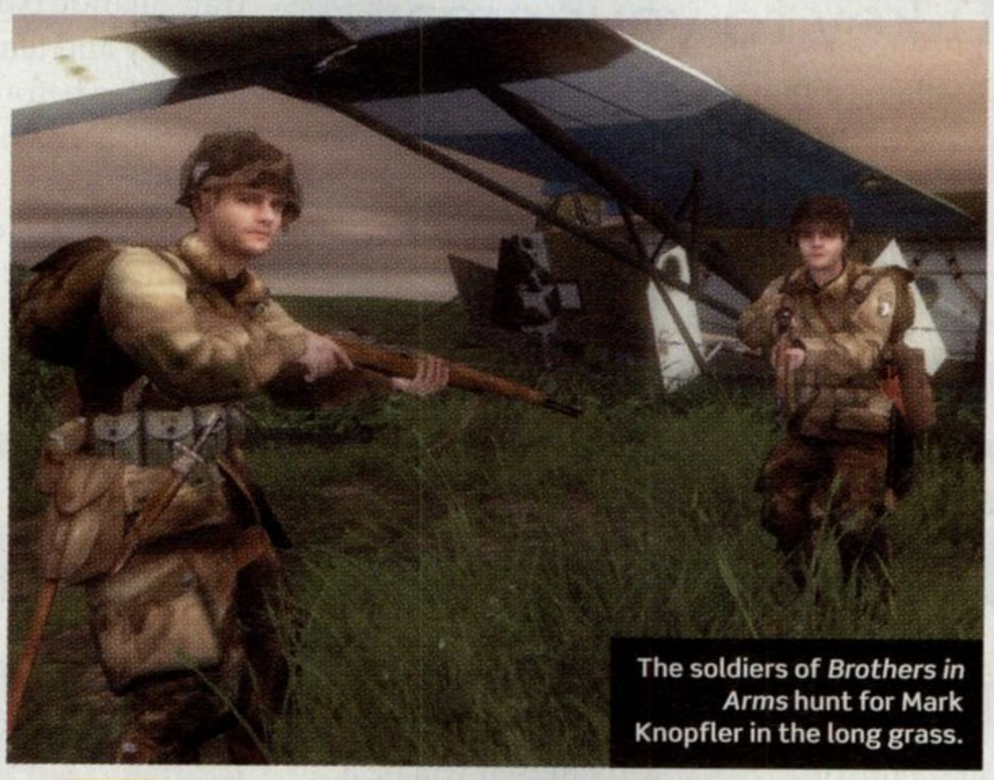
Official ETA Early 2005
We say They told us so

7 THE MOVIES A CLEAN SWEEP

Just as in *The Sims,* the characters in your virtual movie studio will have their own desires and fears to take into consideration. They range from love to hate and all the permutations in between, and different characters have their own way of taking care of business in *The Movies.*

One developer tried giving their caretaker instructions to sweep the floor and left him to get on with it. The mini-caretaker soon hit trouble when he ran out of things to clean up. Did he stop, crash or freak out? No, the industrious sweeper emptied his pockets onto the floor and cleaned that up instead.

Official ETA 2005
We say Hardly a bold call



The soldiers of *Brothers in Arms* hunt for Mark Knopfler in the long grass.

8 GHOST RECON 2 SINGULAR PUPPY

Ghost Recon is one of PC gaming's guilty pleasures. The solid, serviceable action and the tactical nuances are always worth a go. This release distances itself from the *Rainbow Six* series somewhat, however. It's more about long-range shooting and sniping for a start. And there's another item in *Recon*'s kitbag.

Dubbed 'Lone Wolf', this multiplayer mode gives you a package of prototype military toys. Cameras that peek around corners, the ability to call in your own airstrike, etc. The mode gives one player all these, and sets the rest of the map against him. Whoever kills the Wolf gets the gear.

Official ETA Autumn 2005
We say Sounds good to us

Baffled? You can always Ask The Colonel.

9 BROTHERS IN ARMS ASK THE COLONEL

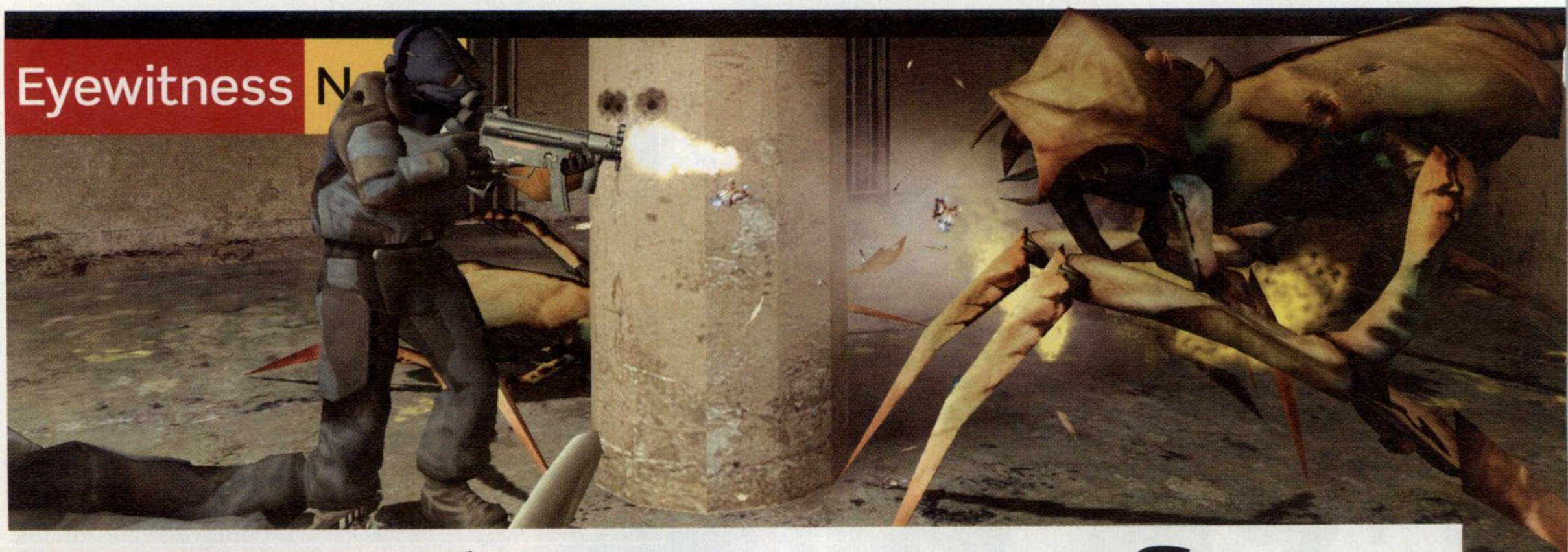
No, not a new quiz show from the makers of Question the Queen. Instead it's developer Gearbox's brilliant way of answering all those fanboy questions about guns and khaki: pass them on to the military (retired). Colonel John Antal, of the US army, fields the obsessive questions that no developer should ever have to touch with a bargepole, and he does it with the authoratah that you'd expect from a professional soldier with a crushing handshake (we've met him). You can find the list of questions and answers at **http://diary.gearboxsoftware.com**. They make for... interesting reading.

Official ETA February 2005
We say The perfect Valentine's gift

10 VAMPIRE: BLOODLINES UNSANE

On sale now, but just too late to make our cut-off date for review, *Vampire Bloodlines* has appealed to the Machivelian in us at PCGA. Troika have decided a hero can be flawed… Really flawed. We're talking drooling, all-fours, no-chance-of-pulling-a-goth-chick kind of mental wrongness. And hey, maybe it'll help the nutbags out there role-play better…

Official ETA Out now
We say In our clutches!



HL-2 steams up fans

Valve's anti-piracy plans alienate customers

Valve have angered their fans by forcing them to authenticate all versions of *Half-Life 2* online before they play.

"During installation the user will be prompted to authenticate the copy and create a Steam account," says Valve's Doug Lombardi. "After that is complete, the singleplayer and LAN games do not require an internet connection." This affects shop-bought versions and means you *have* to hook your computer up to the internet and run Steam to validate the game on each computer, or you won't be able to play it.

Your Steam account binds the CD-key to your email

Jonathan Culberg, a PC GA reader wrote of the frustration many people face: "I do not have my games PC hooked up to the net. I have a separate PC for internet and email because my ISP has a lovely habit of charging extra for each PC that gets hooked up to the net. I will either have to dismantle two PC rigs or have another network connection put through and pay the extra."

There's another problem with the validation: when you create a Steam account it binds the CD-key to your email address. If you buy a second-hand copy the CD-key will be bound to *someone else's* user account. You'll have to send it off to Valve to change it. It's one transatlantic parcel delivery and ten dollars admin fee before you can play the game you've purchased.

Valve neglected to comment when we asked how this would affect gamers' rights to sell or return the game but a Gamestation insider (major high street game retailer) told us: "If the game's locked to a single email address then we won't be able to take it."

Inevitably, a number of fans will decide to look at the cracks that will appear on warez sites. Valve may have made their investment safe but they also run the risk of propelling disgruntled gamers towards the people they were trying to avoid.

SAY *WHAT*?
The month in tongues

Gabe Newell
"If we screw customers over, they will drop us like a hot potato. We could screw our customers and we could also go out to the parking lot, cover ourselves with gasoline and set ourselves on fire. Both seem like bad ideas."
Cuddly Gabe responds to claims that you can only subscribe to Half-Life 2 *over Steam. Hmmm.*

Brian Fargo:
"*The Bard's Tale* is a highly original game in the same category as *San Andreas*, *Half-Life 2* and *Halo 2* so we feel some sort of leak that sounds similar to what they have experienced may be the next logical step in our launch plans."
nXile CEO Mr Fargo uses humour to make his point. Or do you really believe The Bard's Tale *is on a par with* Half-Life 2*?*

Winning over women

Making MMO femme-friendly

If there's one genre of gaming that seems to draw a sizable female audience, it's the MMO. So it's really just as well that those crazy cats at Sanrio have decided to give 'girl gamers' what they want in the very first Hello Kitty MMO: *Hello Kitty World*.

For the first time ever, players will be able to interact with other players in the streets of Kitty Kingdom, XO Federation and Melody-land, open shops, buy and furnish a house, acquire clothing for your characters, raise and train pets, and take quests and duel with other players, all in pink, fluffy, adorable Hello Kitty style.

Kitty herself will be a major NPC, not playable, but that could be for the best. Who wants to see women fighting over something like that eh? Sick puppies.

README
Publisher Sanrio
Developer TBA
ETA TBA

gobbets

***Half-Life 2* Arcade›** Yes, Japanese arcade giant Taito have announced they intend to bring *Half-Life 2* to the arcades by the middle of next year. Quite how it will work in an arcade is beyond even our enormous intellect. Intriguingly, they claim the game will have an online multiplayer, which it doesn't on the PC. It could just be *Counter-Strike Source*, but it's yet to be confirmed.

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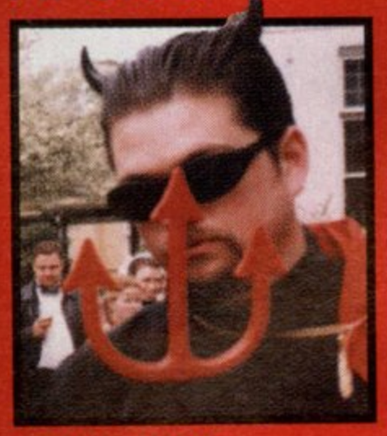
Devil's Advocate

Are game enemies too dumb? Or not dumb enough? Bring on the AI-diot.



STEVE WILLIAMS
used to work in a hang glider factory and once sold hard-to-find punk records to Russians. He's in love with words and sends them valentines, but they never notice. His blood is 49 percent Sumatran coffee.

Oh, the humanity.

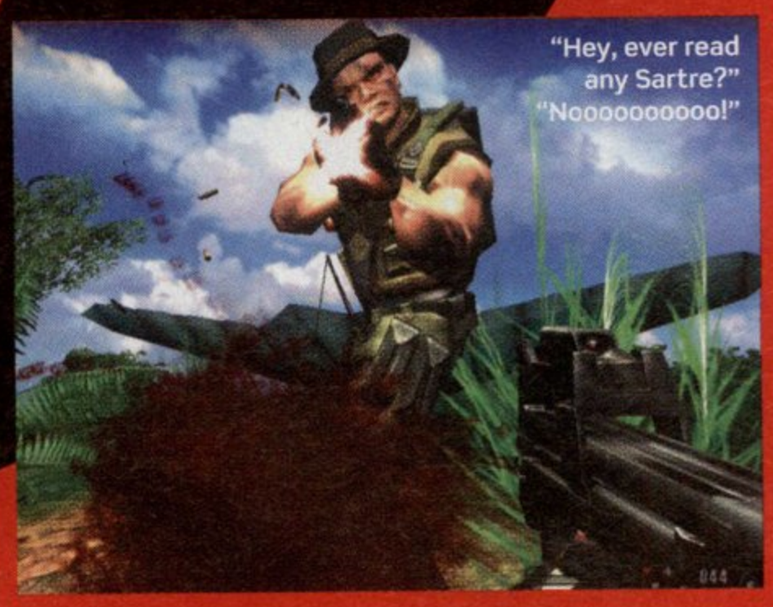
For a situation to be truly gripping, a catastrophe to be a thrill, it takes human life. More specifically, the possible loss of it – would people have watched a motorcycle jump 17 buses if Evel Knievel had just stood on the ground pointing with his spangly cape? Who would care if Nascars go 320kmph if the drivers used radio control units from the pits? And who'd ever go to watch an airshow at all? Knievel bouncing off casino walls with half a footrest up his nose, drivers throwing punches as their cars burn, jet fighters flat-spinning into craft-centre car parks as ejector seats hit the woods… The biggest thrills come when mortals brush with Death and nick his Switch card on the way past.

Oh, admit it. Games don't do humanity very well. Fair enough, they run on PCs rather than billion-GHz human minds, but no computer ever voted for the far-right, so they're not that stupid. And we play games wanting to be fooled, yet right now few games are really trying to fool us. Not convince us with mirrored reality, but fool us with the silhouette of it. There's a difference. Take shooter de jour *Far Cry* – at times the provider of truly human moments. For example, attempting repeatedly to kill two Far Criers in a bunker: I sheltered behind it, having invited them out with grenades. Call them Gary Far and Barry Crier. One time, and one time only, Barry kept me busy while Gary circled round and shot me in the coccyx. Game over, naturally, but so impressively – these guys were thinking! Oh, the tension after that!

For a bit. Soon, the illusion was being furiously kicked to death. Why are our enemies 100 percent fresh, dynamic and accurate after 29 bullets to the face when the 30th will kill them? Why do they stand staring endlessly at the door you're going to come through? How do they all know which leaf your single sniper round emerged from? Gods are omniscient; people are shambolic. Elsewhere, why do *Splinter Cell*'s guards wonder 'who did that?' when a single lightbulb darkens, but ignore security cameras failing in sequence? We understand the need for certain behaviour to set off certain responses, but human minds naturally look for patterns. If they're all tight and neat we notice – it's a survival trait, from when sabre tooth tigers regularly pretended to be dry grasses or rugs or piles of dirty loincloths, whatever, in order to leap out and chew your elbows for tea. Neat patterns are bad and we didn't get this far by ignoring them.

What we need, to quote Douglas Adams, are 'rigidly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty'. Unpredictability, fallibility – these are humanity-defining traits. It only takes a tiny, non-standard delay between pulling the trigger and the others shouting 'what happened here!?' to fool us. Or enemies only knowing the general location of your sniping until you fire again. Or tiny pauses as 'surprised' guards 'assess' what's happening. Or injured baddies getting slower, weaker - this would also add a tactical edge, as you could prioritise. It's not greater AI ability we need, but greater AI fallibility: with people, the one thing you can depend on is that you can't depend on them. And what is it that can turn mechanical catastrophe into visceral thrill?

Oh. The humanity.



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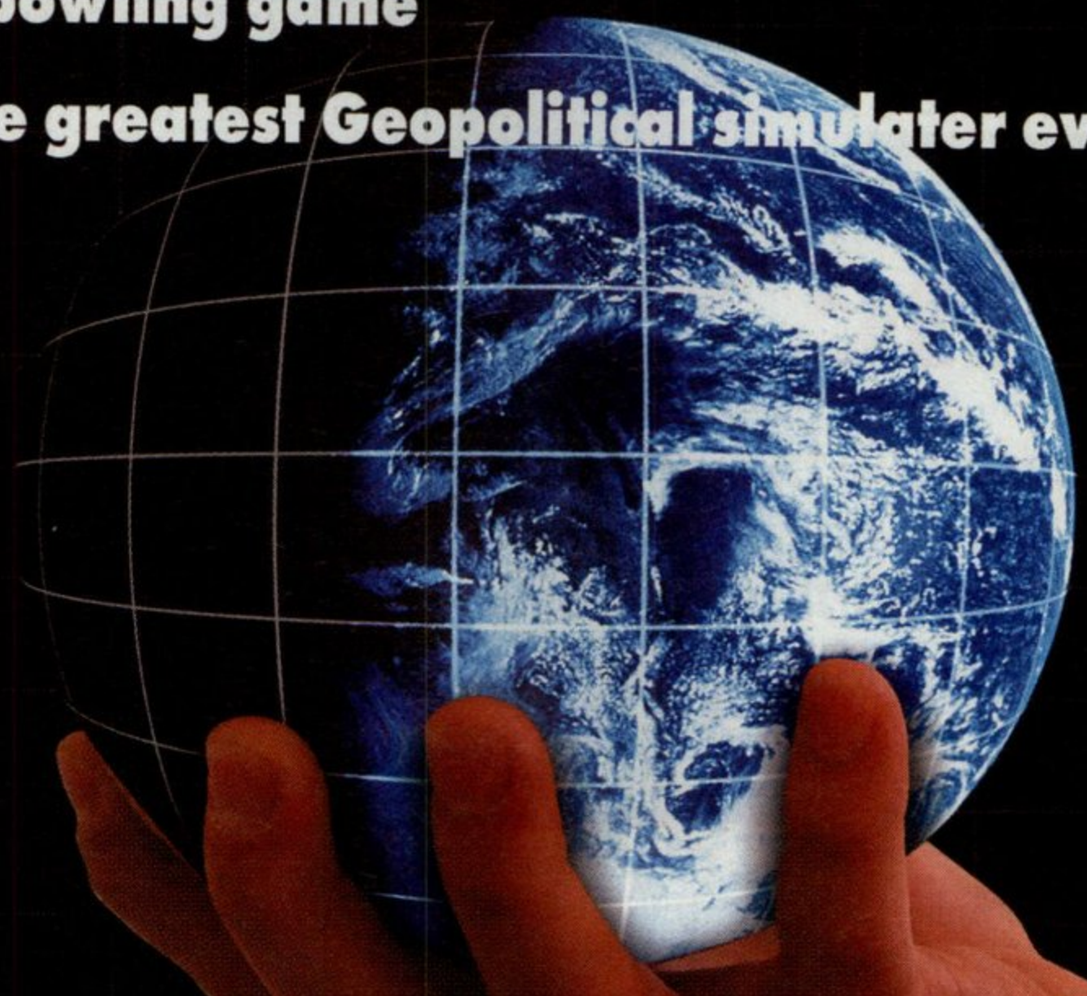

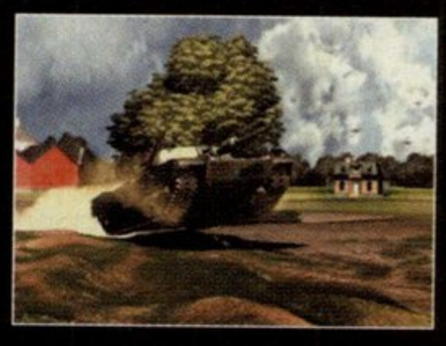

SUPERPOWER 2

193 OUNTRIES - OFFICIAL DATA FROM CIA/US NAVY - UP TO 32 PLAYERS

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DREAMCATCHER

Illustrations by David Lyttleton

As the PCGA team recently suggested, rumours of **Warhammer Online**'s death have been greatly exaggerated. Climax have been busy working on both the game and the engine in the months since we were told it was all over. Karl Jeffrey, CEO of Climax, said: "Work on the game continued apace. We are also continuing to develop the underlying technology and toolset to allow us to create other MMOs going forward."

The engine will remain in Climax's gasp so they can create other properties, but they've managed to retain the rights and Game Workshop's support for *Warhammer Online*.

"We're working very closely with Games Workshop to ensure the rights to *Warhammer* are protected at all times and any game under that banner is to the highest quality possible," Karl explained. The game's future is starting to look a whole lot brighter and you can expect to see it making an appearance in a year to a year-and-a-half's time.

The Spy will be passing his dossier to PCGA.

Now Bungie have released *Halo 2* to the fans, there's time to take stock and think about their next game. It won't be set in the circular universe, though, as the developers want to distance themselves from that for the time being.

Rumours suggest Bungie's next project could be **Phoenix**, a non sci-fi shooter the team were working on before development started on *Halo 2*.

Or it could be a reprisal of their **Marathon** series, although the similarities with the Master Chief's masterpiece suggest they probably won't return to that for the time being.

With Valve using up their bandwidth servicing us with *Half-Life 2*, you'd think they'd have quite enough on their plates. But no, The Spy has snatched secret blueprints from under their noses (well, alright – they left them in the toilet and The Spy had to go) which reveal they're currently working feverishly on the next **CS: Source** update.

Due some time this month we're expecting to see more classic maps including de_prodigy, two new player models and one brand new map. This is part of the reason Valve introduced Steam: constant, after-sale updates. Not too shabby.

The tenuous link of them both being online games brings The Spy to his next discovery: there's a **Hello Kitty** MMO in production. Rarely is The Spy second to know anything but office Sanrio aficiando Ms Starr has scooped this sleuth! Her field notes aside, check out www.sanriotown.com/onlinegame if **Animal Crossing** online sounds like your sort of thing:

Speaking of pets, a University of Florida scientist has cultured rat brain cells and created a "brain" that can control a flight sim. If the image of a petri dish playing **MS Flight Sim 2004** disturbs you, write in and tell Dan Toose. Word has it he's on the lookout for a couple of cheap staff writers, and Eliot and Asher are looking over their shoulders neverously.

The Spy will let you know if they manage to survive the next month.

Spy out.

Pssst! It's...

The Spy

"...once she brought out a large bottle of baby oil and a knobbly potato, The Spy made his excuses and left."

The Spy's contact details are included within this sentence.

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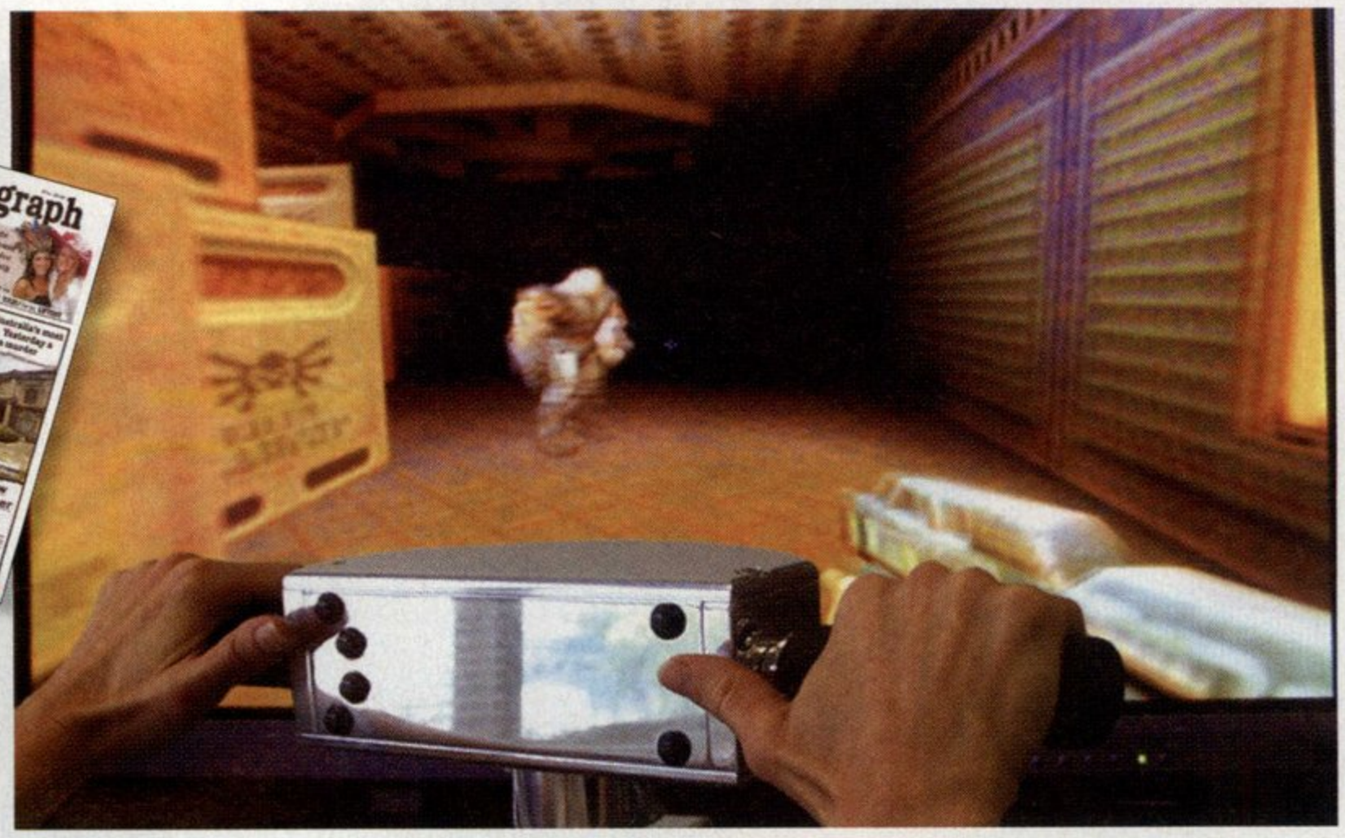
COMMENT

The blame game

Two and a half years ago, two men broke into a house in Sydney and opened fire on the residents, killing a man in front of his family. Then, early November this year, when the Supreme Court was told by Crown Prosecutor James Bennett that the accused, one Sophear Em, was dressed "in an outfit inspired by the violent computer game *CounterStrike*". Given that the dress of a typical *CS* avatar is not only based on real life, it is difficult to see how such a comment can be made with any true veracity – especially since Em himself is denying that he was involved in the killing in any way. But apparently, he had "some interest, and... derived some enjoyment" from CounterStrike, so the game *must* be at fault.

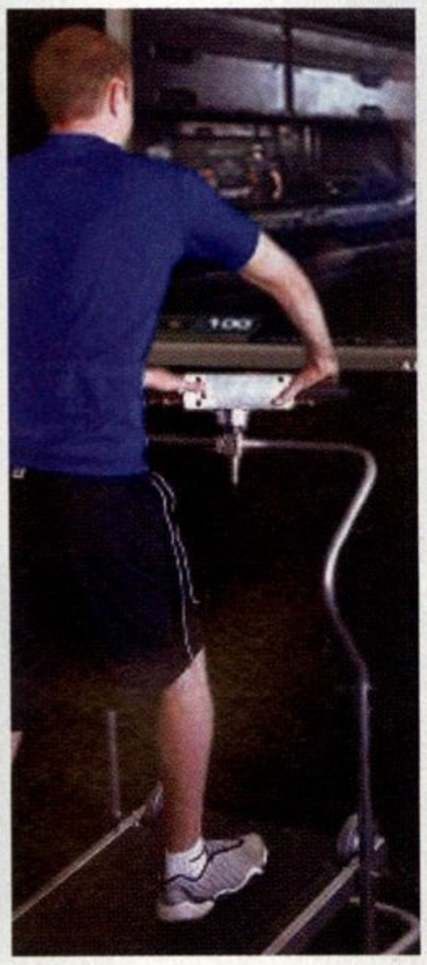
On November 5, The Daily Telegraph ran a full cover story on the case, with an enlarged photograph of the victim and screenshots of *CS: Condition Zero* across the cover, bearing the heading, "Deadly Reality". It also took the story a few steps further, quoting Bill Muelenberg, vice president of the Family Planning Association: "These newer games have interactivity and graphics, so you can really assume a role with them." That certainly seems relevant, concise and to the point. Shame it misses the point.

There are so many things that are shameful about this. Mostly it's a shame that facts and statistics aren't at all referenced when citing gaming as inspiration to a criminal act. Of the countless number of people that have played CounterStrike, how many actually commit a crime because of it? A percentile figure that low would mathematically suggest there's no connection at all.



The Running Game

Tired of playing first-person shooters and not getting any exercise while you do so? Well, we're not either, but apparently someone is. Enter the *FPGameRunner*: a treadmill that makes you walk to control the action in your favourite FPS. It controls much like riding a bike: you walk to make your character move (keyboard function), and you use the handlebars to turn in the direction you desire (mouse function). Buttons on the handlebars can be configured to the reaction time you desire.



Yeah, it sounds a bit cumbersome, especially since your own walking speed determines the speed of your avatar's movement. Luckily, you don't necessarily have to run in order to run in-game – the treadmill is configured so that a comfortable walking speed is all that is required to make your avatar run, meaning that you can play for hours.

It's set up so that it can be used with relative ease, with the buttons on the control pad set in the handlebars performing the function of keyboard and mouse controls, and the whole unit is plugged into a USB port, from which it also derives its power.

Be that as it may, it's unsure exactly how many FPS gamers will want to get up and walk for hours at a time in order to enjoy a full session of a favourite game. But, it's great to see someone doing something insane and innovative with hardware, even if the execution leaves us all short of breath.

README

Publisher N/A
Developer N/A
ETA TBA

GfK THE PC TOP 10 CHART

REGULAR ROUTINE RE-ENTRY

Sadly, it would seem *The Sims 2* has failed to kill off the interest in the original Sims, even though it incorporates so many of the elements from all the expansions. Put simply, "WHAT ARE YOU PEOPLE THINKING!?!"

Okay, we know it's not you, and we don't blame EA for continuing to cash in on the series, but the mainstream's lack of variety is totally lame.

Chart topper, yes, but it hasn't managed to kill off its predecessor

POSITION	GAME	PUBLISHER
1 (1)	*The Sims 2*	EA
2 (3)	*The Sims: Deluxe*	EA
3 (10)	*The Sims: Unleashed*	EA
4 (2)	*Rome: Total War*	Activision
5 (RE)	*The Sims: Superstar*	EA
6 (NE)	*Rollercoaster Tycoon 3*	Atari
7 (RE)	*The Sims: Vacation*	EA
8 (4)	*Wahammer 40k: Dawn of War*	THQ
9 (NE)	*The Sims: Hot Date*	EA
10 (4)	*The Sims: House Party*	EA

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THIS IS HARDCORE

The games cabinet of Dr Caligari

Craig 'Safety's off' Pearson

THIS IS...

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

PlanetSide news is it's about to go live with its giant-frickin' robots. By the time you read this, the update will have filled the servers with BattleFrame Robotics; massive metallic monsters that stride across the landscape like King Kong done up in fancy dress.

They're basically portable weapons platforms – heavily armoured, with huge destructive capabilities. And, as you can see in the screenshot, some can even take to the skies to rain death down like a Chernobyl rainy day. There are some brilliant touches: the BFR's can siphon energy off enemy vehicles to replenish, and the shields continuously recharge because the BFR's size automatically makes it a target.

And if you don't already have the glorious MMOFPS (no-one uses the third-person mode) now is the time to go out and get it – out in the shops is the original bundled with the expansion and all the patches, just in time to celebrate the game's two-year anniversary. Sign up.

Pulp friction

Probably in response to the tongue-in-cheek games-that-have-been-released-since-*DNF*'s-announcement, George Broussard has announced that they now have a physics engine. Mequon are the company lucky enough to be associated with the bubblegum-less ass kicker, and we're running a demo of their wares to celebrate the first actual *DFN* news in a while.

Big robots. Coming to a *PlanetSide* game near you.

Shot something? Catch Craig at pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

Mark 'Jackanory' Sutherns

THIS IS...

ONLINE

Out with the old? Well nearly. *Horizon's: Empire of Istaria*, Artefact Entertainments' MMORPG hung on for dear life this month, saved only by a buyout by Tulga Games. The ill-fated game, published by Atari, surely faces an uncertain future despite its new owner's insistence that it will keep it alive.

Now in with the new: with more than a few little tiddlers nibbling on my online gaming bait. Across the pond Icarus Studios have penned a deal with comic creators Platinum and have announced they'll be creating several MMO titles based on their licences. The forthcoming comics 'Blood Nation' – a story where a team of commandos is charged with the mission of invading a nation of vampires and 'Atlantis Rising' – a tale of war between an underwater and surface civilisation, are the first two to be set in production.

Growing concern

Still in the US, my interest's been aroused by *Seed: The Human Condition*, in development at Runestone. A sci-fi MMORPG set on a distant planet, the game will be built from a comic-style, cell-shaded graphics engine and be completely bereft of combat. *Seed* are placing their bets on a story-led quest engine and AI that will apparently enable NPC's to feed players new threads in their individual yarns. Fascinating stuff that can be explored further at the official forum – http://rpg.boomtown.net/en_uk/bb.

Tell some tales? Contact Mark at pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

THIS IS...

SIMULATION

Tim 'Hull-Down' Stone

The ticker tape news machine on my desk has been spewing out huge amounts of papery tagliatelle this month.

First came the report that *Strike Fighters* fabricators Third Wire had been secretly slaving away on a 'Nam project. *Wings Over Vietnam* (wovgame.com) with its carrier ops, SF-style sequential campaign, and dozen flyable fighters should be finished by the time you read this. As yet no UK publisher has been confirmed but I'd be surprised if it wasn't in British boutiques by Christmas.

Beau bridges

Then there was the equally unexpected disclosure that over a year after its release Microsoft were about to patch *MS Flight Sim 2004*. It's a testament to superb QA and the mind-boggling scope of the sim that the bugs to be squashed – an autogen memory leak and localised season change problem – probably won't have been spotted by too many users. Even if you aren't desperate for the fixes, extra content like new bespoke bridges and support for finer terrain mesh should make the download worthwhile.

Half tank, half mech: the Marder 1A3.

Among the tangle of other stories, eSim's low-key announcement that the street version of *Steel Beasts Pro* was just a few weeks away almost went unnoticed. A graphics engine up to speed with DirectX 9's latest effects, and new rides like the Bradley and Humvee make this – after *SH3* – my most wanted sim right now.

Thrown a track? Contact Tim at pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

Mark 'Schwerpunkt' Donald

THIS IS...

STRATEGY/MANAGEMENT

Nothing is as tantalising as a good WWII 'What If?' scenario. What if the Germans had captured Moscow? What if the British Expeditionary Force hadn't escaped at Dunkirk? What if the Japanese had won the Battle of Midway? Oh, the implications. Enter Paradox's *Hearts of Iron 2*: conjuring alternative realities like a time machine. It hands over the reins of power for any WW2 state and wheels in a shredder for the history books. What if the Allies defeated Germany in the Battle of France, then invaded the Soviet Union on a wave of Bolshevik-bashing belligerence? How would Britain and France fare if they tried to encircle large Russian armies in 1941? *HoI2* licences players to engineer their own 'what if' stunts because it's liberated from the pre-scripted historical events that restricted the first game. The sequel also aims to streamline the original's obtuse interface that left some

feeling like they were fighting the game rather than the War.

HoI sin sauce

But the essential *HoI* character is left intact. You make the decisions that change the course of the war. Shaping the economic and political character of a nation; ordering divisions into battle – but you don't fight the battle. Yours are the higher concerns. Securing oil supplies, ordering research into nuclear weapons, and pinning a shiny medal on Rommel's chest when he captures Stalingrad.

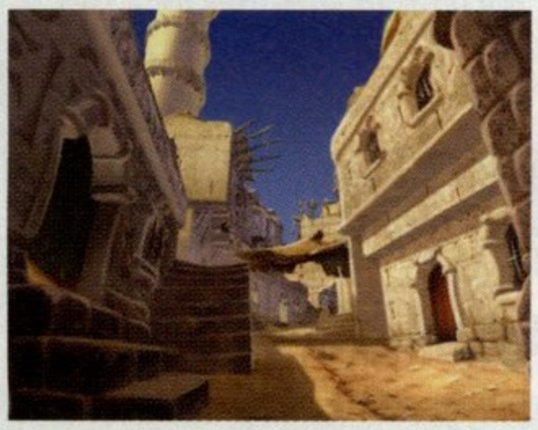
Parley like it's 1939 with Mark at
pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

THIS IS...

RPG/ADVENTURE

Eliot 'Facial features' Fish

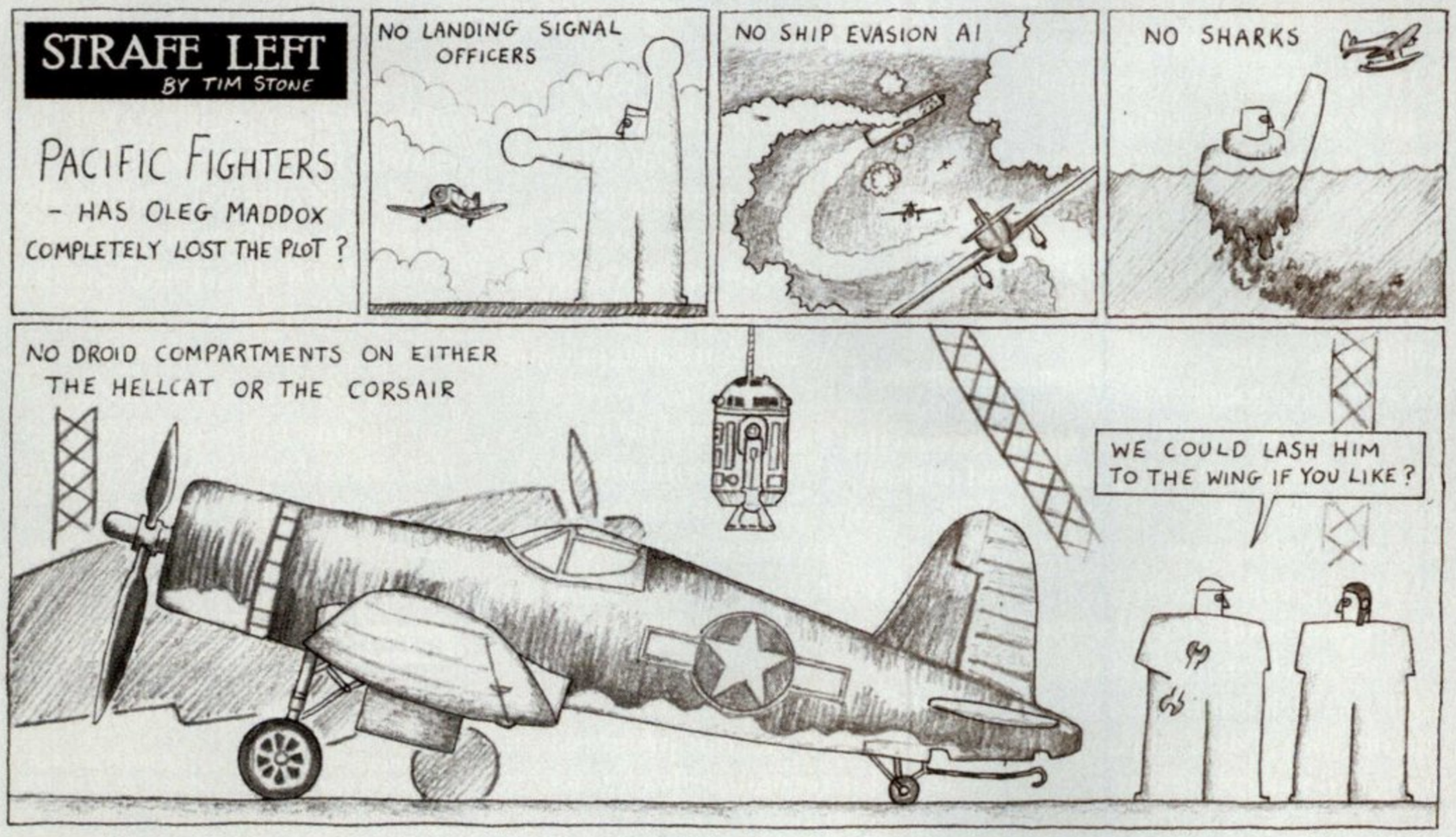
Whilst 3D environments have become amazingly more detailed, realistic facial animation seems to be the one feature that's been dragging the RPG chain for a number of years now. But if *Half-Life 2* is any indication, non-player characters might finally be breaking free from their mannequin shells. Instead of conversing with Botoxed corpses (just play Deus Ex 2), we'll soon be interacting with visibly emotional characters, which is sure to enhance the immersiveness of gaming.



Express yourself

Excellent voice-acting can be crippled by a hollow blank stare as that crucial dialogue is delivered, then what's the point? Upcoming RPGs that promise to feature more lively NPCs include *Vampire, Bloodlines*, *Oblivion*, *Everquest II*, and *Gothic III*. The latter's German dev-team, Piranha Bytes, will be using the Emotion FX 2 facial animation system that promises movie-quality character animation in games. Piranha Bytes are confident that their NPCs will be even more convincing than *Half-Life 2's* Alyx. Just think - forget about having to check your charisma - the next time your character visits a merchant, you only need look them in the eye to see where you stand.

Lost your keys? Contact Eliot at
eliotf@derwenthoward.com.au


STRAFE LEFT
BY TIM STONE
PACIFIC FIGHTERS - HAS OLEG MADDOX COMPLETELY LOST THE PLOT ?
NO LANDING SIGNAL OFFICERS
NO SHIP EVASION AI
NO SHARKS
NO DROID COMPARTMENTS ON EITHER THE HELLCAT OR THE CORSAIR
WE COULD LASH HIM TO THE WING IF YOU LIKE ?

James 'Pkunk Fury' Cottee

THIS IS...

ODDBALL

Once, not too long ago, one of the more unusual PC games on the market led to a humorous misunderstanding between myself and a prominent magazine editor. I mentioned "Strange Adventures In Infinite Space," and he thought I was referring to pharmaceutically enhanced recreation, instead of the cosmic exploration game from Digital Eel. (*Perhaps it had something to do with you staring into middle distance and speaking in tongues James* - Ed)

Pigs in Space

Now, two years later, Digital Eel is on the brink of releasing the sequel. *Weird Worlds: Return To Infinite Space* promises more of the same infectious action, with a fresh roster of aliens, artifacts, planets and perils. Currently in Beta, this exotic new round of Duck Dodgers tomfoolery should be splashing down in January 2005 (February at the latest). In the mean time, we can amuse ourselves with the original game, of which a fully functional demo is freely available. The full version costs just a tad over $20, assuming you buy it electronically over the web. Also available: mods from the rabid SAIS community. If this Christmas has left your gaming budget in tatters, affordable distractions like this are the go.
Digital-eel.com

Zarnoth
Skree Kwawa'a III
THE CHOICE
4664
There can be only one Galactic President! Earthlings, go to your polling pods and Vote on November 2!
Determine the fate of YOUR Star System
Fang & Fiberglass Party
Feather & Slime Party
Yig?nabbo
Blorbus

For instructions ask James at
jcottee@derwenthoward.com.au

5,000 years before the lightsaber was invented, Jedi could only wave bright fluorescent tubes around and pretend.

A new hope

Knights of the Old Republic 2

RELEASE FEBRUARY

The genius of Bioware was to set their game 5,000 years before Phantom Menace. Lucas' universe is a rich one, and while his films do not necessarily live up to the dream, it remains an ideal place in which to set an intricate, ethically driven RPG adventure. And this time around, that adventure is being written by Chris Avalone, who wrote the literate and much admired RPG *Planescape: Torment*. *KotOR 2* is thus a sequel that we looked in on recently with something of the excitement of seven-year-olds on Christmas Eve.

While tweaks have been made to Bioware's engine (most crucially allowing dozens more characters on screen at once), it all immediately feels comfortingly familiar. However, this might well be one of the few comforts going. Inspired by the morally challenging nature of Bioware's original, Avalone has set out to create a darker, more complicated moral world. Previously, choosing between Light or Dark was often a stark and obvious choice, making being evil in a subtle way virtually impossible - a common problem in games that allow 'evil' acts. Do you do good, do you do bad? Avolone's intention is to blur that line and make decisions more complex.

THE PITCH

Cinematic Star Wars adventure, in the form of an RPG to rival the acclaimed original *KotOR*.

As you'd expect, there are also piles of new Force powers and feats, 60 of them, with more elaborate animation routines that develop as your characters become more powerful. It appears that more emphasis has been put on battles, increasing their importance in your progression.

As for recognisable characters, T3 is present at the start, and others will cameo. Don't tell anyone, but thanks to an accidentally loaded level, we are pleased to confirm that an HK model droid also appears, with a *very* familiar voice.

LucasArts tell us that various team members cried during testing, and not because of bugs. If it can reduce those developing it to emotional wrecks, just imagine what it could do to us.

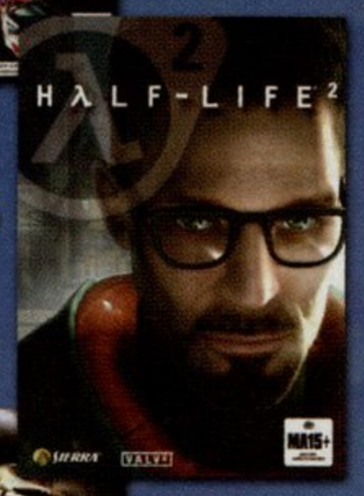
JOHN WALKER

README

Publisher Activision
Developer Obsidian Entertainment
Link www.obsidianent.com
Adventure, emotion, moral choices. It's our chance to star in another epic Star Wars tale.

GAMES WAREHOUSE

What's your Game?



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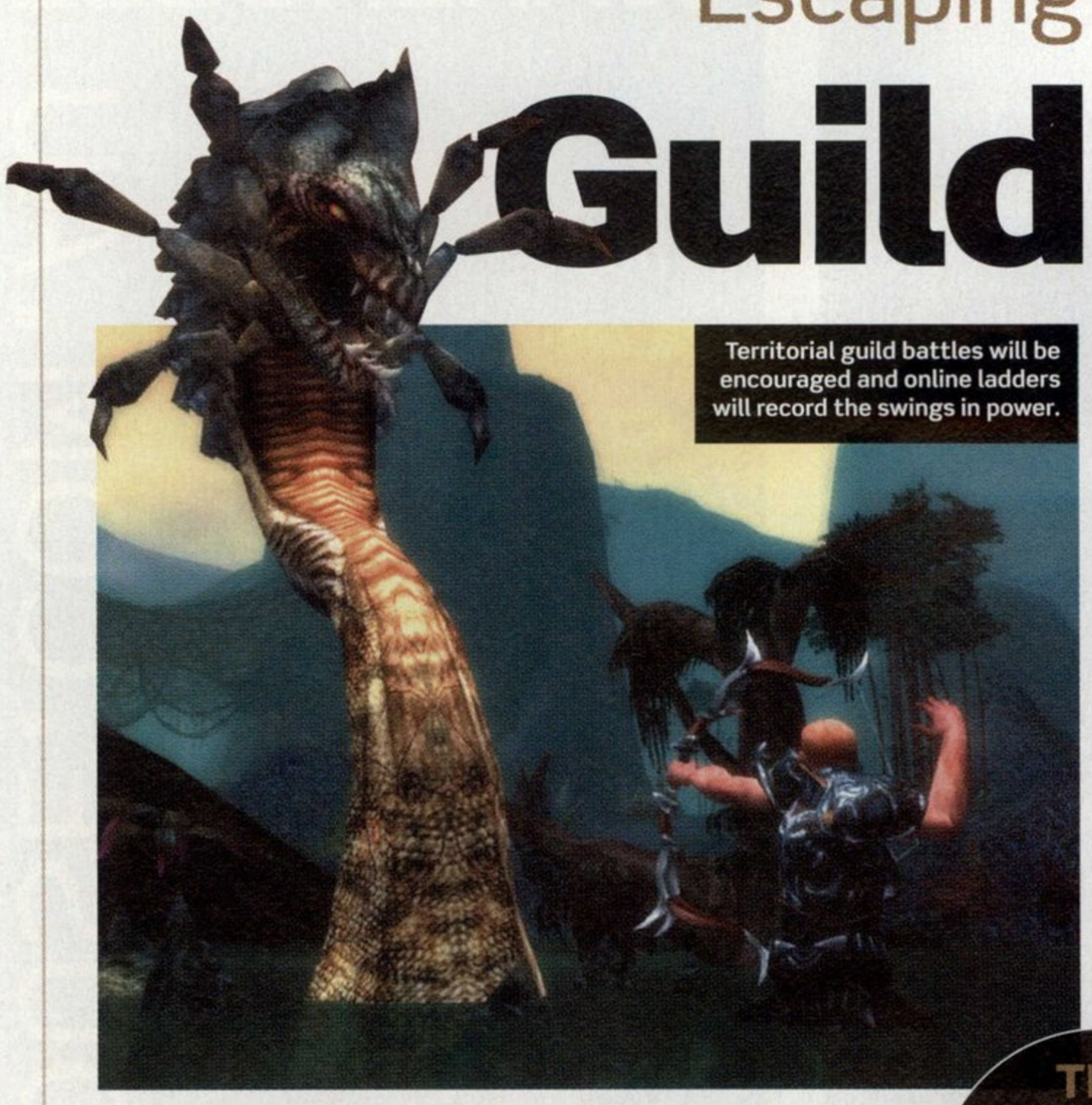
Escaping the grind

Guild Wars

RELEASE FEBRUARY



Territorial guild battles will be encouraged and online ladders will record the swings in power.

THE PITCH
The old MMORPG template smashed up and pieced together without the slog and subs fee.

You've hit your 747th spider. You've earned yourself Level 14, and the bag of gold that the arachnid was harbouring. You should feel exulted, but instead feel numb. You know you can't compete with the power gamers: those 18-hour a day, hardcore players whose fanatical commitment will always give them the advantage. They've hit more spiders, so they'll kill you, too – it's MMORPG law. A decree *Guild Wars* seeks to shatter.

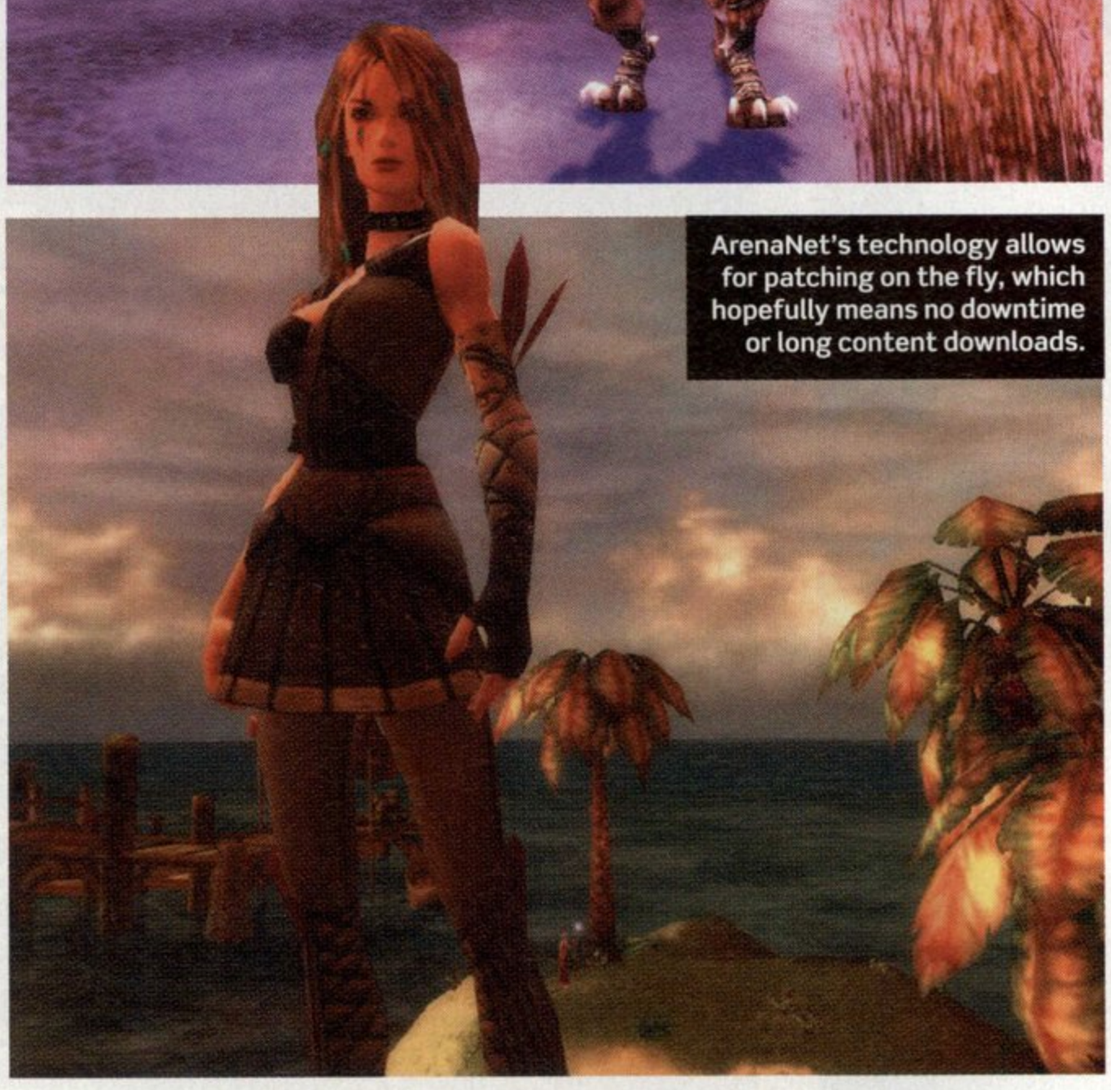
Refreshing as a flagon of ale after orc-bashing

The latest from the prolific NCSoft production line, *Guild Wars* has a fantasy setting and basic character templates (six in all consisting of warriors, spellcasters and scouts) cast straight from the traditional mould. But elsewhere the approach is as refreshing as a flagon of ale after a strenuous orc-bashing.

This is a game built around combat, and touted as the first competitive, skill-based MMORPG. Completing missions and winning experience remains a central ambition. But while points mean new skills, spells and classes, giving more experienced players greater options, the system shouldn't fall foul of the power gamers. Likened to a MMO version of *Magic: The Gathering*, players will select from their raft of powers and skills when going into battle or embarking on a mission. The idea is to carefully choose the right eight skills that focus on the weakness of an opponent. Choose wisely and, during battle, a low-level character can prevail over a higher-ranking foe.

Complementing this accessible skill-based combat is a travel system that allows players to instantly join friends and guild mates. Played on one giant global server, world map locations are accessible with one click and if you don't already have a party, city areas act as hubs where solo players congregate to form groups and take up missions.

Accepting missions hands that group of characters a u nique version of the quest map which locks out other players (so there's no 'kill-stealing') and the group can use their powers to change the shape of their own map. This takes place in cooperative zones that won't allow for player vs player confrontation, a pleasure



ArenaNet's technology allows for patching on the fly, which hopefully means no downtime or long content downloads.

"Ahh, pretty lady with flashing orbs. Must not look into the ligh..."

Were Disney taking the franchise a step too far with its latest sequel: 'Lion King: Simba Evolves'.

reserved instead for gladiatorial arena's dotted around the map or during vast guild vs guild warfare.

If all this isn't radical enough, NCSoft have decided you'll only have to pay for the game when you buy it - there's no monthly fee here. If this sounds like the Battle.net setup that served Blizzard's *Warcraft* and *Diablo* online audience it's no accident. ArenaNet are made up of several of the architects responsible for that system so good stability and support are hopefully a given; all funded by bi-annual expansions that while not essential, will hand players further skills, weaponry and missions that should prove irresistible to the 18-hour spider slayers and casual players alike. Whether or not it will rival *WoW* and *EQ2* is another matter.

MARK SUTHERNS

README

Publisher NCSoft
Developer ArenaNet
Link www.guildwars.com
Instant gratification in gorgeous worlds with your guild mates for just one wallet hit.

Dentally endowed, slavering monsters take on scrawny, skirted, ginger kid. Place your bets now!

FATAL ATTRACTION

Not all weapons spit lead

Perhaps the most exciting addition to the *Doom 3* formula is the Ionized Plasma Levitator, or Grabber. Not a direct weapon as such, it can be used to pick up or 'catch' objects as large as barrels, enabling you to stack objects to clamber higher, return hurled fireballs or even repel small enemies.
Do say: Wow, that'll open up all sorts of interesting physics-based interactions!
Don't say: Hey, isn't there one of those in *Half-Life 2*?

Evil has a new game

Doom 3

RELEASE LATE 2005

Resurrection of Evil

Humankind is essentially a bit stupid. We keep on making the same old mistakes: starting wars, picking scabs, drinking strangely coloured booze... schoolboy errors, really. But something in our genetic make-up says, "Hey, I know we unleashed the forces of hell and nearly wiped out mankind *last* time, but, well, it couldn't go wrong twice, could it?"

The existence of an expansion for *Doom 3* was never going to be an astonishing revelation. And nor is the announcement that, once again, you'll be fighting the minions of Satan rather than, say, leather-clad Nazis. So why the cover? Why the excitement? Well, for a couple of reasons. We'll come to them in a minute. But first: just who the devil *are* you?

THE PITCH
More devilish minions, more mad scientists, more gibbering terror and more gibs. Bring it on!

One thing's for sure: you're not the marine who went to hell and back in the main game. It's not quite clear what happened to him – perhaps he was pensioned off and went to live on a ranch in Montana (although it seems more likely he's been crouched in a pool of stale piss, rocking back and forth in a padded cell, since returning from his exploits). In fact, you play a 'combat engineer' – a phrase we don't think means you go around organising fights. Although Nerve Software, who previously worked with id on *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, are behind the meat of the expansion, id are still in creative control, so we leapt out on them from a darkened cupboard and pressed them for more details.

> But first: just who the devil *are* you?

"After *Doom 3* finishes in an epic battle with the Cyberdemon at the Hell Hole in November 2145, the UAC holds a news conference and reports their research post on Mars was destroyed by a reactor malfunction and that no one has survived," reveals an evidently excited Matt Hooper of id Software. "Five months later, a UAC orbital probe receives a faint, unidentified signal originating from the Site 1 location on Mars – which was thought to be a dead site.

"In August of 2146, UAC scientist Dr Elizabeth McNeil, leading expert on the ancient Martian civilisation, is sent to Mars to re-open the Erebus complex and lead a team in discovering what is emitting ▶

the strange signal. You are a combat engineer in a large security detachment sent to the Erebus complex to both protect and keep an eye on Dr McNeil.

"In March 2147, the Site 1 chamber is opened and the source of the signal, a mysterious Evil Artefact, is discovered. Led this time by Dr Betruger, who is now fully demonised, Hell is unleashed once again to hunt down and recover the Evil Artefact, which you now possess."

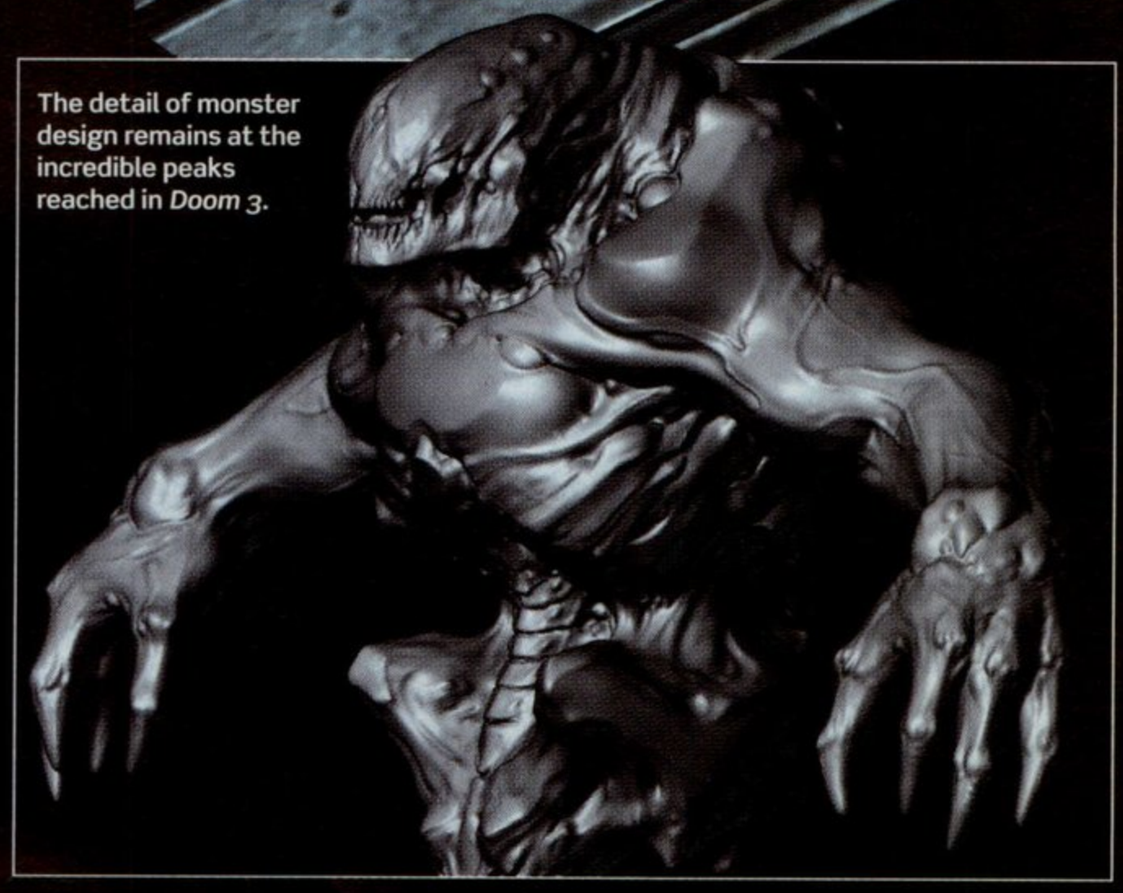
See? As a species we should be taught from birth: do not open the evil portal. Do not open the evil portal. Do not open the evil portal…

One of *Doom 3*'s more effective locations was the strange alien ruins being excavated by UAC deep beneath Mars' surface. *Resurrection of Evil* will begin in these dusty environs, where you first come into contact with the critical artifact: think carved monoliths mixed with the harsh lights and scaffolds of human archaeology. From there, you'll progress upwards through Site 1 – the location of UAC's first Mars mission – and then through the Phobos Labs. Here, you'll meet one new friend and one old one: the former is the boss, Dr McNeil. But the latter is the good old double-barrelled shotgun, one of the two new weapons alongside the Ionized Plasma Levitator (see page 28).

New shooters are all very well, but *Resurrection of Evil* has more tricks up its sleeve than that. Although facing down Dr Betruger in Hell itself will be your ultimate battle, he sends out three powerful demons to hunt you down before you ever get there. After defeating the first of these, you'll realise that the artefact you're carrying is more than a bauble: it enables you to gain the supernatural powers of these super-monsters once you defeat them. From the first you get the cutely titled 'Hell-time' – you move normally, but the world around you is slowed down.

> Multiplayer will also get a lick of paint

Resurrection of Evil will throw three new beasts your way, in addition to the three 'boss' hunter demons. The Vulgar is similar to the ubiquitous Imp but is even faster, and tends to lurk, crawl and then leap at you. The Bruiser is the heavyweight horror the name suggests: with two cannons for arms, it deals and can take massive punishment. The Forgotten



The detail of monster design remains at the incredible peaks reached in *Doom 3*.

closely resembles the Lost Soul from *Doom 3*; a flaming, flying skull that'll test your accuracy and reactions.

Multiplayer will also get a lick of paint. Support for eight players on a map will be officially added (better late than never), Haste and Invulnerability will be included in the power-up roster and an inevitable slew of new maps will also appear.

If you're an old *Doom* hand, you'll probably have twigged by now that *Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil* is acting almost like a remake of *Doom II* (by comparison to *Doom 3*'s remake of *Doom*). Developers Nerve ▶

Vulgar by name, vulgar by nature. Only a mother could love 'em.

Just as with *Doom II*, the double-barrelled shotgun will be introduced. Gamers will have nightmares about its long reload time.

Be afraid, this is what dentists will use on your teeth in the future

The devil's a traditionalist when it comes to interior design. It's horror-gothic all the way, and no chintz.

and id in particular are clearly obsessed with re-creating their past glories with today's technologies, perhaps to the detriment of some elements. The reappearance of the double-barrelled shotgun is a kind of id signature, but it's good to know they're open to new ideas, such as the creativity-inspiring Grabber gun.

Doom 3 split the gaming world on its arrival this summer; you either loved it or hated it. With much more of the same promised, it doesn't look like *Resurrection of Evil* will do much to change people's opinions. But then id have never seemed terribly concerned by what other people think. After all, hell is other people...

ROSS ATHERTON

More fodder for the double-barrelled shotgun. These Vulgars will spawn and attack in droves when you least expect it.

Scientists don't have to be ugly, but they *do* have to wear specs.

README

Publisher Activision
Developer id Software/Nerve
Link www.doom3.com
A return to the demonic domain beckons, with even more frights, guns and monsters

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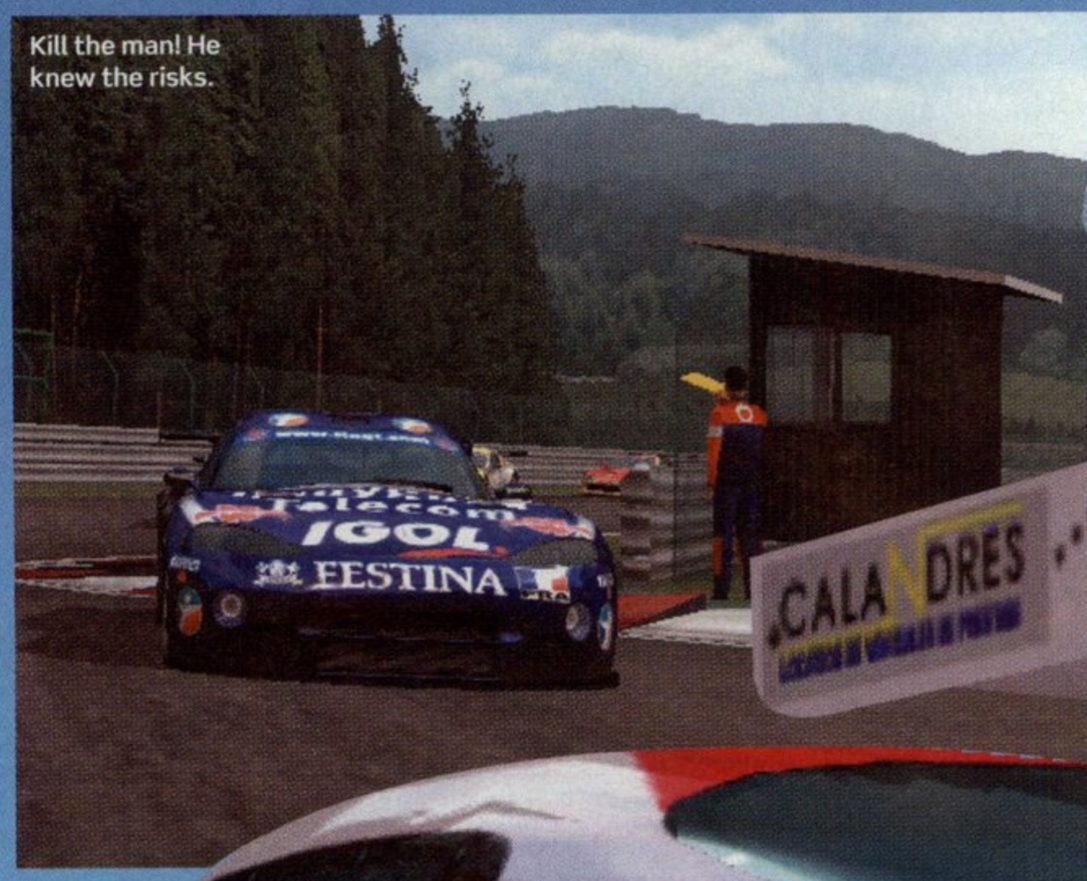
Product Awards & Honors

You don't have to be nuts to work here. But it [dies].



Kill the man! He knew the risks.

Sim elation

RELEASE FEBRUARY GTR

THE PITCH
The Blue Peter presenter of sims – friendly, accessible, but hardcore at the drop of a hat.

ON THE DVD Experience the blistering thrills of *GTR* for yourself > Demos

For some strange reason, GT cars get little coverage. Strange because they're so very lustworthy – Ferraris, Porsches, Morgans, Listers – road exotica that goes sideways more readily than it goes forwards. And this year Maserati joined up with the rule-baiting MC12, while Lamborghini rolled out a Murcielago that, if it wasn't a car, would be a torchlit Nazi parade with horses.

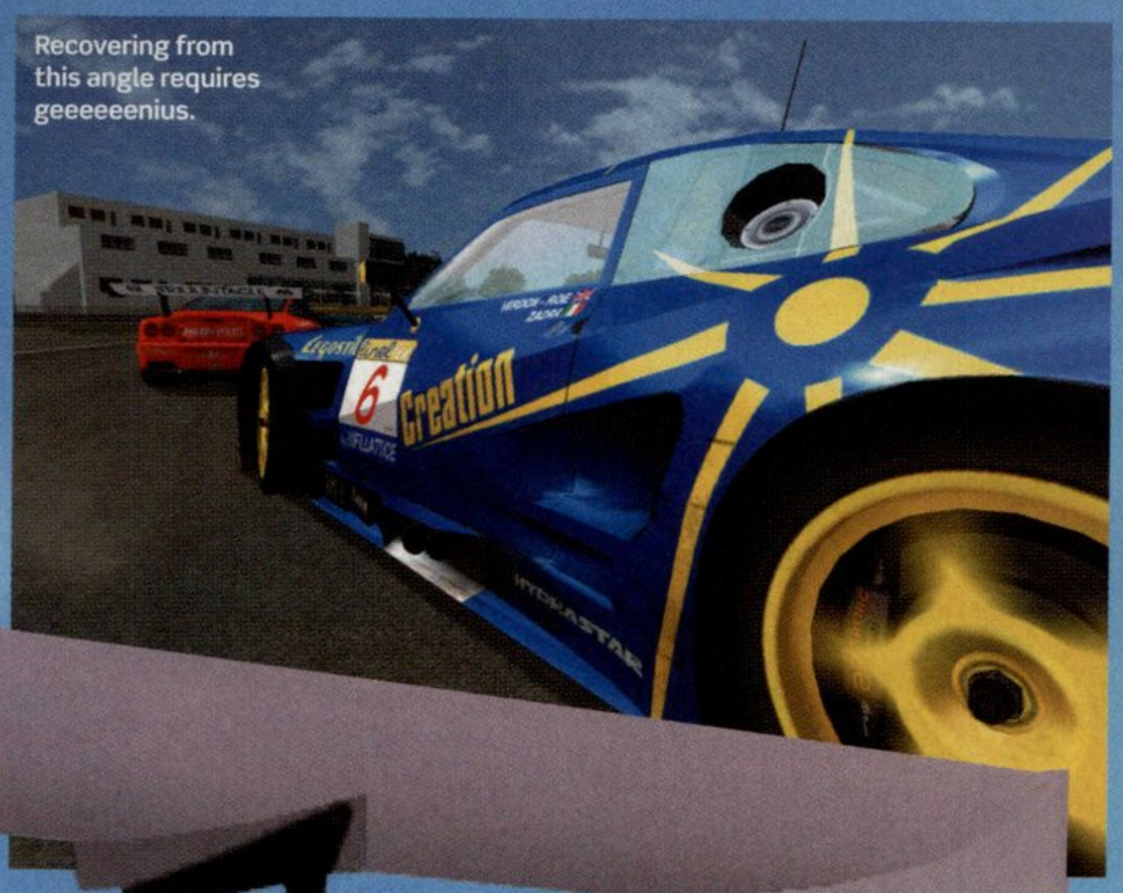
Intimidating? You'd weep like a scratched girl at a glimpse of its moon-sized brakes. So maybe the disinterest is due to the lengthy endurance format; maybe it's due to the 'gentlemen' drivers whose slow throttles are weighted with cash. Whatever. You hardly care now and you'll hardly care later – *GTR* is promising indeed.

Balancing realism against fun is tough, as survivors of *Richard Burns Rally* will know. The reward can be deep satisfaction akin to, say, getting your finances squared away ("Tax doesn't have to be taxing! It just is!") but you risk desolation and public snivelling at the just-locked door of Threshers upon over-correcting into your 81st spin. So we found, anyway. Unusually, *GTR* actually steps up to the plate to deal with this sad, weary scenario.

The three difficulty modes bear three distinct physics models, not just the usual juggling of driving assists. And playing early code, it's clear this is no PR pipe dream – in Arcade, cars can be thrown around with heterosexual abandon (like gay abandon, but with bad shoes) while all relevant info erupts in on-screen overlays: virtual pitboards, lap timers and mirrors. Friendly front-end design makes life easy, and four difficulty levels lurk within Arcade itself, culminating in 'Alien On Wheels'.

At the other extreme is Simulation, where lovers of *Grand Prix Legends*, *GP4* et al will feel at home. And let's face it, the number of that home is accurate to 56 decimal places – every parameter you could wish

Brake late. Do not invite these people in.



Recovering from this angle requires geeeeeenius.

for can be fiddled with. Incredibly, datalogging is by the actual Motec software the teams use, and *GTR* will ship with the proper handbook. But even if you huff and ignore the meaning of it all, adjusting stuff – stability, spin recovery steering and gear assists, corner markers, flags, damage, tyre and fuel use, suspension and wings, I'll stop here but the game doesn't – is easy. You can even use asymmetrical settings, GPL fans, and nothing is tied to difficulty. Quick illuminating interview nugget: Q. "So have you modelled fuel weight change?" A. "We've modelled fuel slosh as well–" And so it was I ran weeping to Threshers' bolted door. It was 10.02pm.

36-car AI races already work

There may 'only' be ten tracks, but the depth of experience on any given one makes this near-irrelevant. Not only have they been cast in a super-accurate GPS mould, but the bumps have been reverse-engineered from suspension telemetry. What's more, new tracks – or variations, such as Monza with its historic banking open – will become available along with new cars, such as that Maserati. Sim Bin appears serious about this post-release support; the 'What's New?' button covers the top fifth of the menu.

Naturally there's online and LAN – tested with 20 drivers so far, but likely to be capped far higher as 36-car AI races already work – with the expected array of options. Indeed, having practiced by turning EA's *F1 2001* into a very successful GT mod, Sim Bin's design confidence shines through. *GTR* appears – almost alone – to be stirring the near-poisonous essence of exacting simulation into a tastier mixer of fun, and without watering it down. And the sweet lord of grain-based alcohol knows we should Mexican Wave in honour of that, 10.02pm or not.

STEVE WILLIAMS

README

Publisher: 10tacle
Developer: Sim Bin
Link: www.simbin.com
Humanises driving sims: it'll make better drivers of us all. Or nervous wrecks.

Why, look: it's the lesser-spotted jingo

Close Combat First to Fight

RELEASE JANUARY

There's little time to appreciate fine Persian artworks.

Hit-location means that enemies can be felled with a hit to the head or kneecap.

THE PITCH
Troublesome types need to be suppressed in the Middle East. Go, go, gadget Military-bloc!

"Hello terrorists. Are you in there? Hello?"

Those of you who have been taking notes will recall that the *Close Combat* games have crafted some fine, realistic combat over the years. These were strategy games that boasted attention to detail, tactical splendidness and, according to Tim 'Rommelbuster' Stone, included some of the finest Nazi death-rattles of all time. *First to Fight* is attached to this series in name only. We're no longer posing heroically in the lanes and meadows of Normandy, but instead getting gritty with the terroriztas in modern-day Beirut. And this time out you're in the thick of it: *First to Fight* is introducing *Close Combat* to Mr FP Shooty.

First to Fight puts you in the role of the fireteam leader of a US Marines urban warfare squad. While you'll be familiar with the 'realistic' pace and trajectory of combat, seen many times in the likes of *Ravenshield* or *Delta Force*, this time you're playing quite a different tune. These are the Marines, not special forces, and the game reflects that fact with unerring detail. You're fighting alongside three other soldiers, each of whom has a specific role in the fireteam, just like real-world Marine action.

The AI controlling your men is a fine beast, with only minor wobbles to make it ever seem less than sturdy. While the innate responses of your buddies allows you to handle most situations with ease and efficiency, it's also possible to give these chaps orders, such as laying down suppressing fire, or storming a room. The effectiveness with which your team carries out such actions all hinges on *Close Combat*'s familiar concessions to morale. In *First to Fight* your team will be more accurate and faster to respond to danger if you're issuing sound orders and acting like a hero yourself. Lose a man or allow yourselves to be peppered with Kalashnikov spit and the men start to lose their cool. The same goes for the enemy too, so the more brutal you are in capping their mates, the more likely it is that bads will either leg it, or simply give themselves up for capture. No honour among dweebs and all that.

Peppered with Kalashnikov spit...

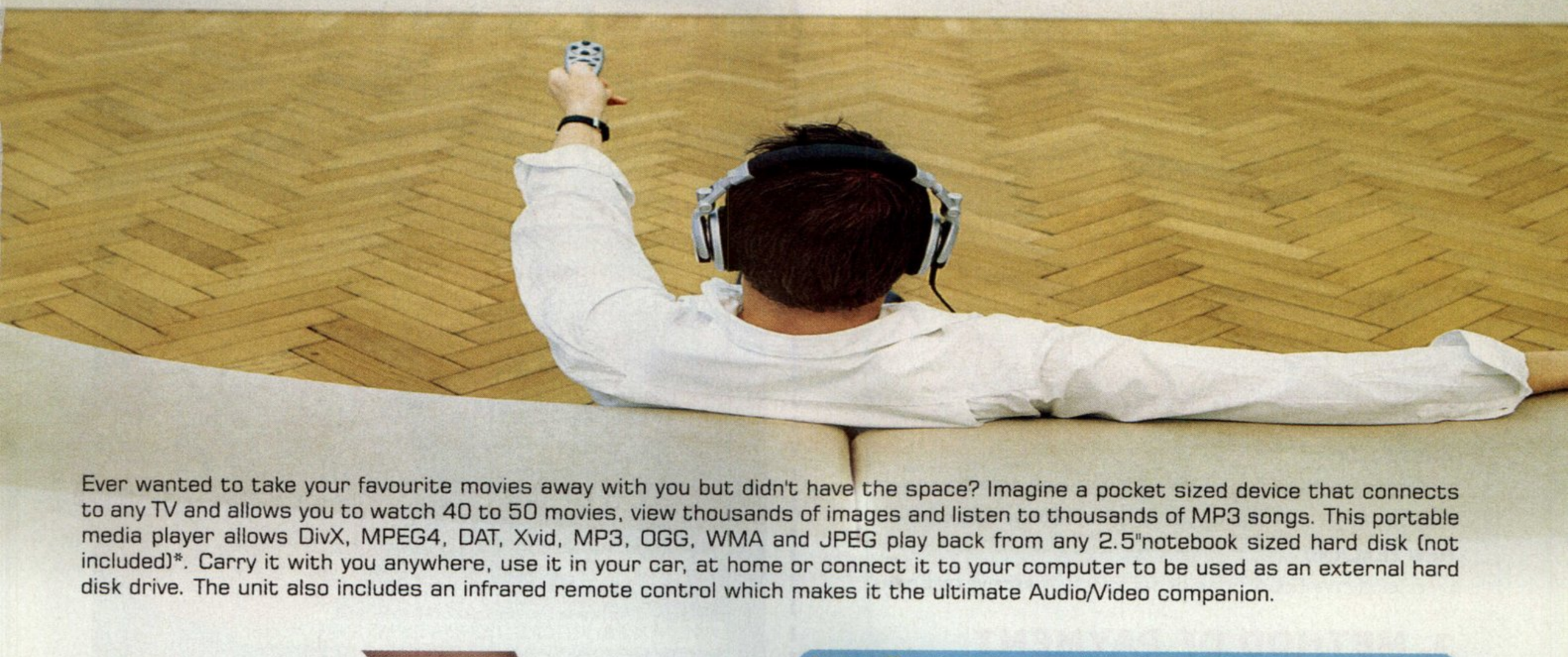
Sounds good, but the accent on realism underlines the core problem for games like this: they run the risk of being rather dull. The drab streets of Lebanon are unrelenting in *First to Fight*, and the fact that most of your enemies are all Kalashnikov-toting 'terrorists' could detract from the variety of the final experience. Perhaps the fact that *First to Fight* is being developed as a training tool for US marines explains why it often feels both divorced from the realms of games-as-entertainment, and also manages to seem awkwardly jingoistic - hardly a suprise for a game based on American military manoeuvres. Come January, we'll discover if they remembered to include any fun in the package.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

README

Publisher Take Two
Developer Destineer
Link http://firsttofight.com
A flag-waving US Marine training sim turned commercial game. Could be moderately fun.

Redefining the Boundaries of Portable Entertainment



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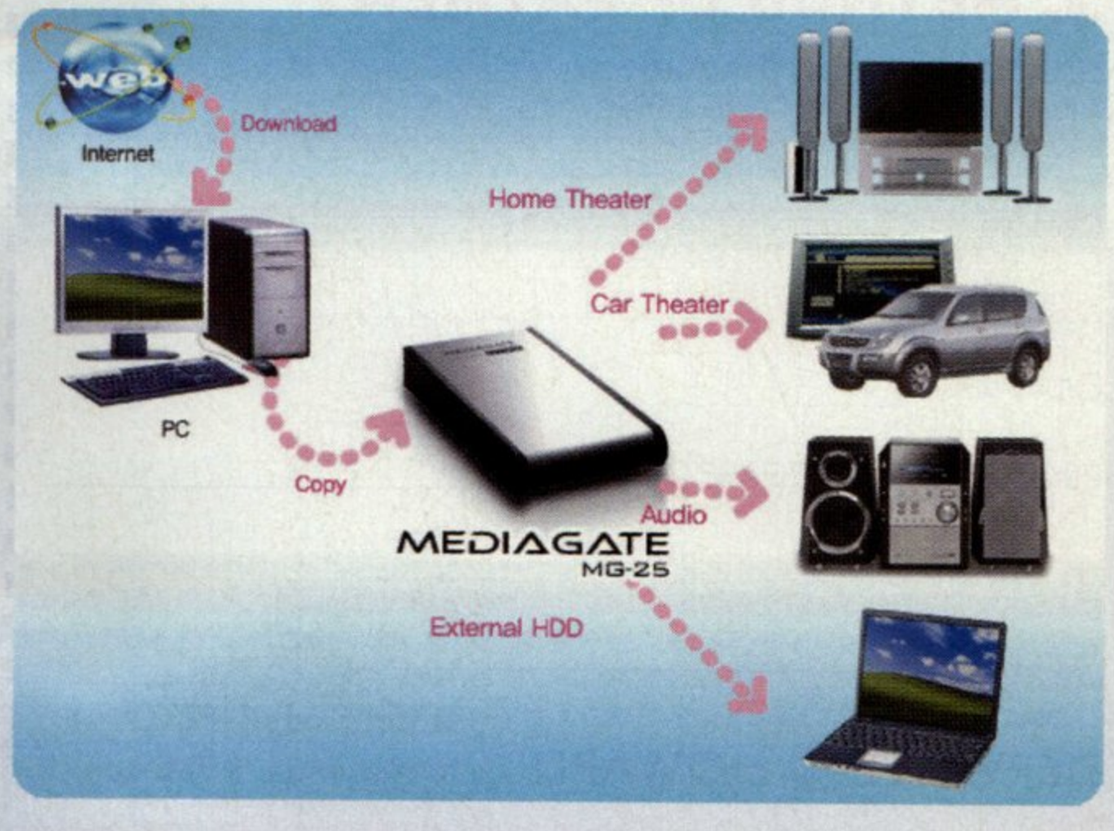

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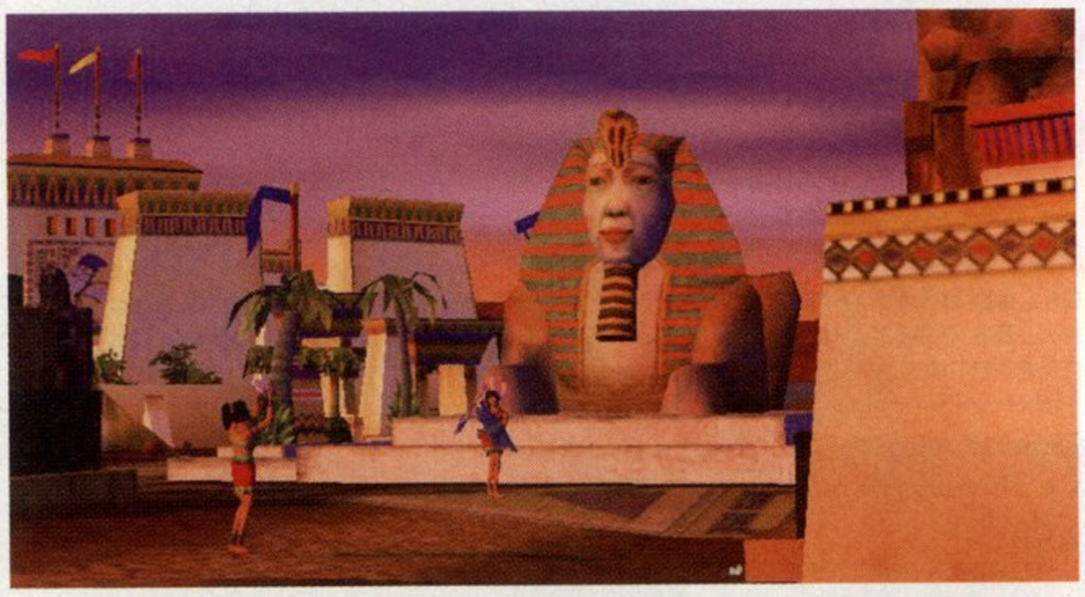

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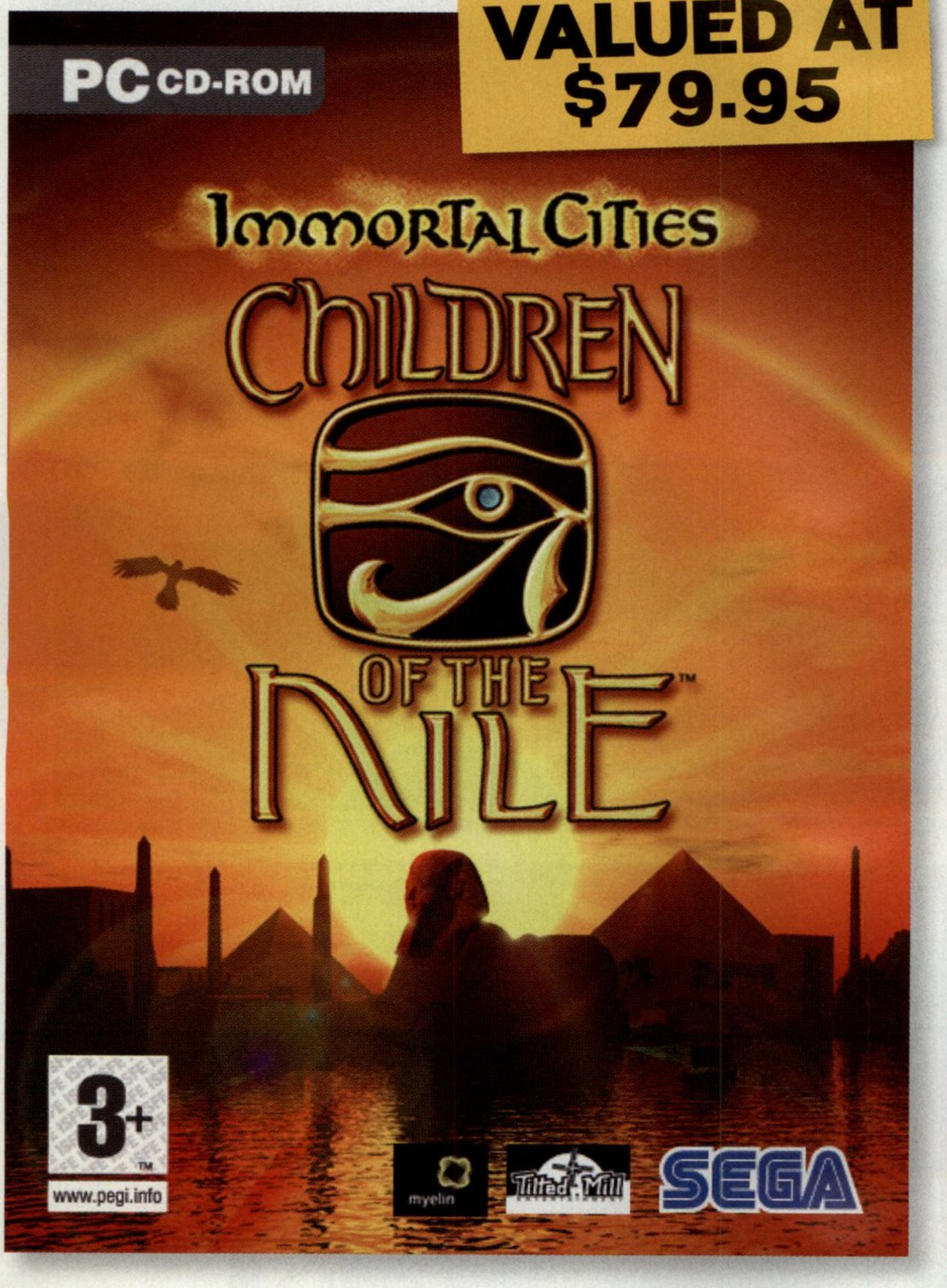

Just missing this issue's review roundup, CHILDREN OF THE NILE is one of the better construction sims to grace the PC GAMES ADDICT offices in some time. Build stunning ancient cities fit for a Pharoh and enrich the Egyptian empire to new heights. Thanks to THQ, readers who subscribe for 12 months will receive CHILDREN OF THE NILE for FREE.

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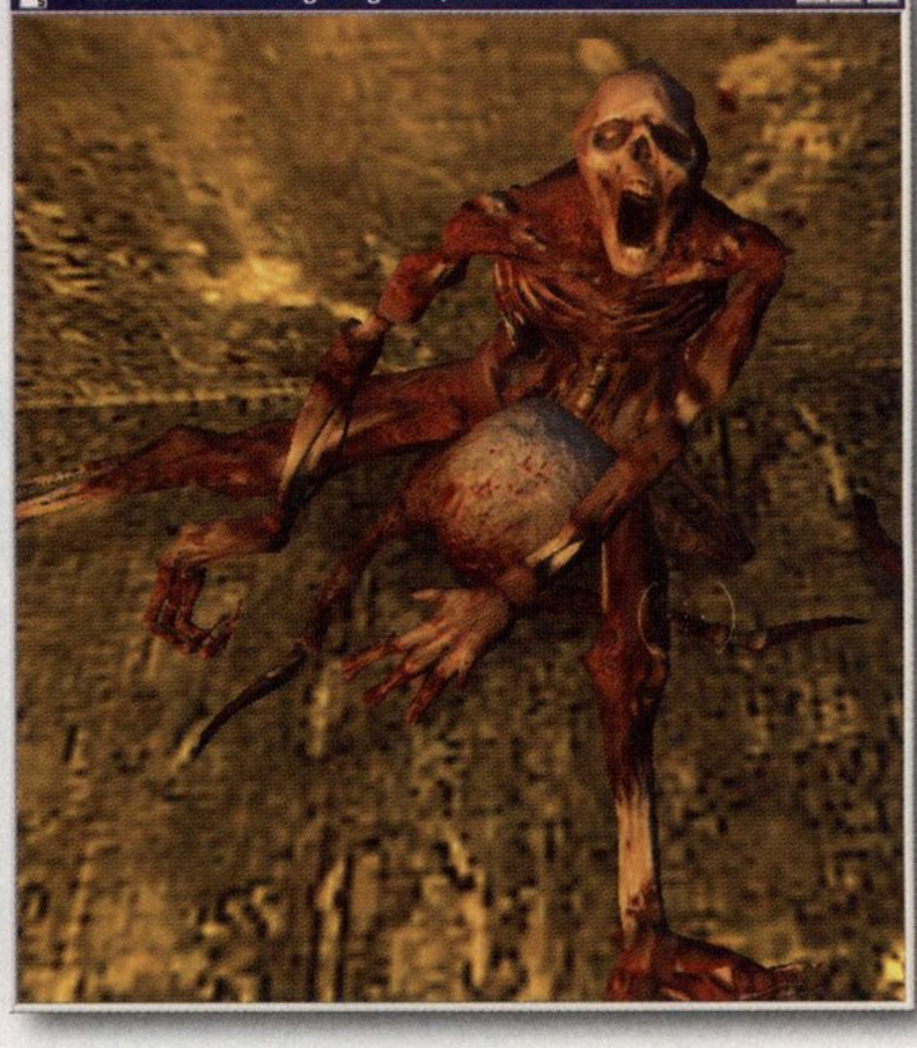
Gamer Snap

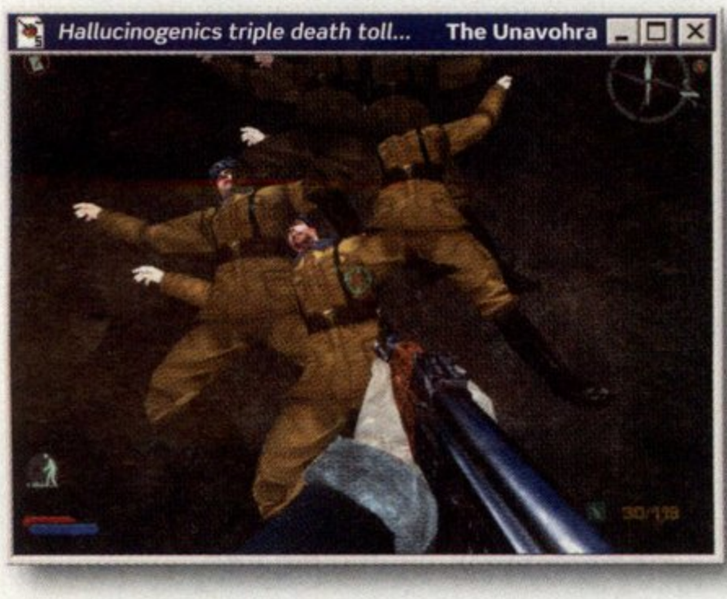
Ed: "How about if it was less... filthy?"

You know when you die you get a massive... **Jon Hill**

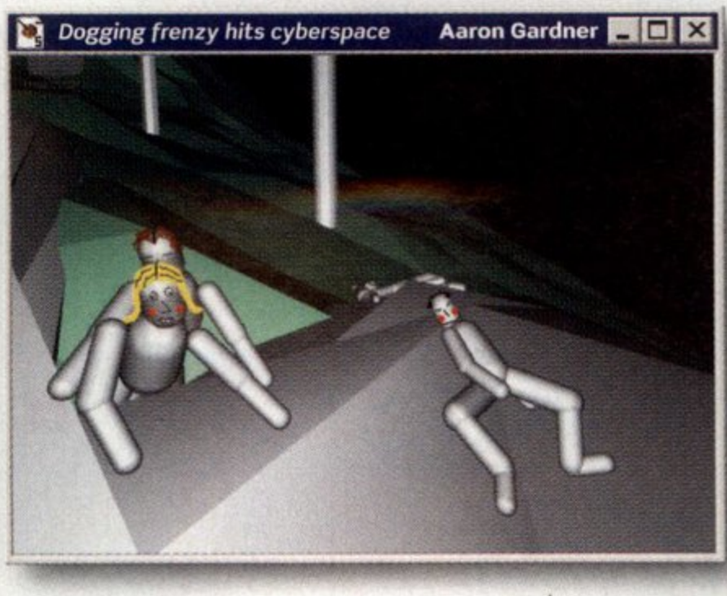
"Those damn crabs are getting out of control..." **James Garner**



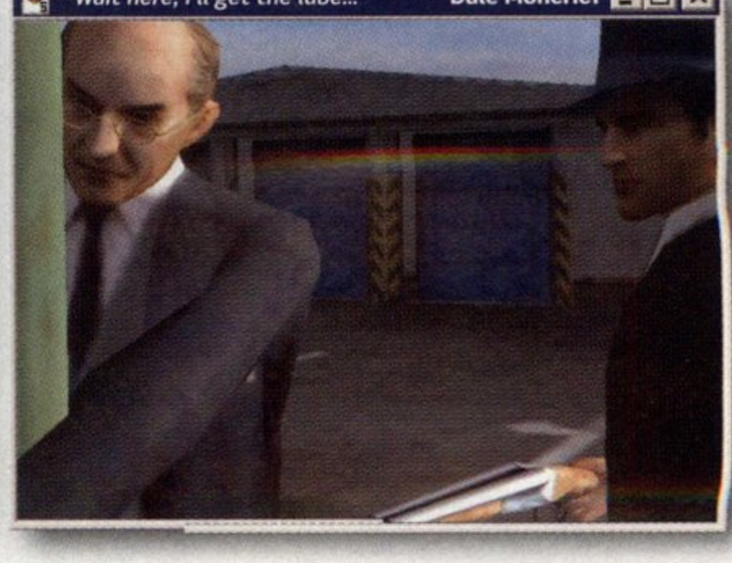
Hallucinogenics triple death toll... **The Unavohra**



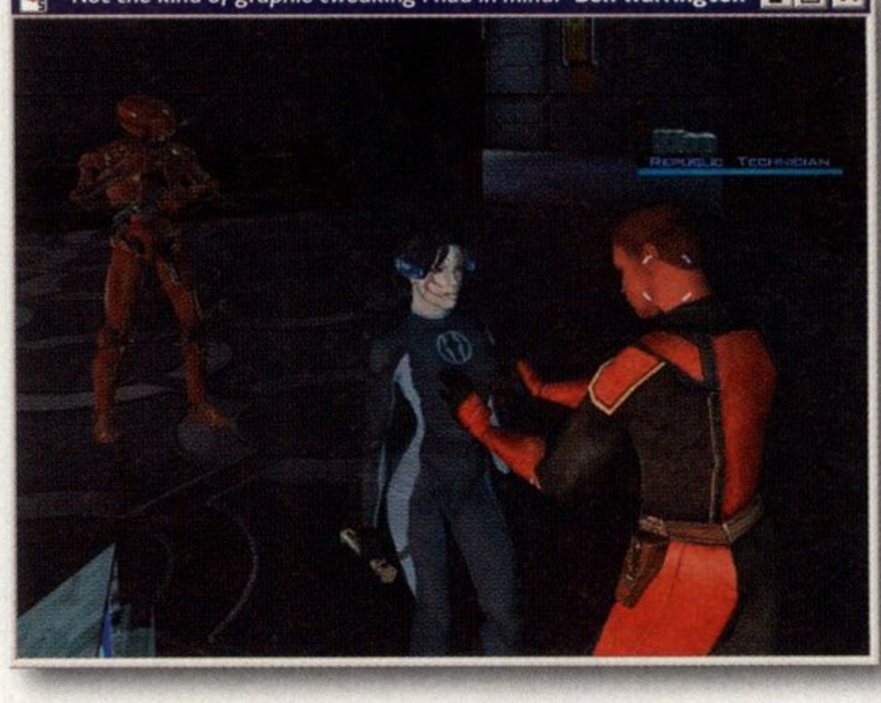
Dogging frenzy hits cyberspace **Aaron Gardner**



"Wait here, I'll get the lube..." **Dale Moncrief**



"Not the kind of graphic tweaking I had in mind." **Ben Warrington**



Sunbathing **Jack Tebbutt**

In the recycle bin this month, as voted by Art...
Yet again, the distance between divinity and dullness is measured by a hair on a mouse's eyebrow. Jack's offering has all the ingredients of a Snap great (inappropriate placing of characters in a surreal landscape with well cued props) yet remains, curiously, rubbish. Oh well...

CREATIVE

Need a capture program? Use IrfanView on the cover disc! Then send your snap & witty caption to pcga@derwenthoward.com.au with "SNAP" as the subject. Funniest entry each month wins an excellent set of Creative T770 speakers!

Uncensored

After all, how hard can this reviewing lark be?

WARCRAFT III
Reviewed by Philip Tran
PCGA 1, Score 90%

The scary undead folks. We love them.

Ah, Blizzard. *Warcraft III* is one of the best games I've ever played. Each race is perfectly balanced, with its own tactics. The addition of creeps and heroes is a welcome change from tanks and special units of other RTSs. The ability to pick up and use items, plus level up abilities gives the game a nice RPG feel.

The single-player campaigns and skirmishes are good to start with, but the ultimate high for this game is multiplayer. The thriving community of *WC3* is a testament to Blizzard's skills, and bodes well for *World of Warcraft*. Graphically, the game isn't challenging, so it worked well with my old GeForce 2 MX, but then I upgraded, and I saw the game in all its glory. The landscapes are rich and the units detailed. But I'm not happy. Why? Because I played this game so much, my parental unit banned me from playing the computer. What does she know?

Philip's Rating 92%

PCGA *responds: We've met our fair share of* Warcraft III *obsessives. We watch them, hunched over, fingers flying across the keyboard, build routines and short cuts permanently ingrained into their memory. They're having a whale of a time.*

READER REVIEW OF THE MONTH

DOOM 3
Reviewed by Dave Gooding
PCGA 25, Score 90%

This the gaming revolution. Why? It's the first FPS I've played where I can hide under a desk. Pacemakers beware, this game does no favours for your heartrate. It's scary. From the moment a jittery scientist exclaims, "The Devil exists! I know… I've built his cage!" through to the credits, id prove themselves masters at telling stories, a rare talent.

Doom 3 isn't about new levels of non-linearity or super-human AI. It's about scaring the *[brown* – Prod Ed*]* out of you. The very linear nature of the game is frightening. It doesn't matter how big the beastie in the next room is, you've got to go in. And gone are the days of ample ammo. Conserve it, or you might as well serve your brains on a plate to the hellish ones.

Oh, come out from behind the sofa, Dave.

A lot of time and effort has been spent in creating an engaging yet uncomfortable atmosphere. Marines scream for help and exclaim in sheer horror, "They're coming through the walls!"

So start again, and this time listen to every conversation. Read every email. Listen to every audio log. id have created a story masterpiece. *Doom 3* is scary. It's here, and it wants to eat your brains.

Dave's Rating 93%

PCGA *responds: The shadows get us every time. We peer into the dark, praying for a moment's peace. Something moves, we jump, then relax – it's just a corpse.* Doom *is stunning.*

DOOM 3
Reviewed by David Smith

YOU ARE SO WRONG

Doom 3 isn't really a sequel, it's a remake. And remakes don't work – think of Stallone's Get Carter!

The original was of its time. *Doom 3* is dated. The vision of the future is mid-'80s *Aliens*-esque, gameplay is mid-'90s corridor walk, spin and shoot, AI is mid-'90s WWI over the top and collect the bullet with your name on it.

My parental unit banned me from play

The FPS has moved on in ten years. *Doom 3* doesn't give you the unexpected of *Half-Life*, the inspiration of *Far Cry* or the drama of *Call of Duty*. *Doom 3* gives you exactly what you expected of a remake. And that shouldn't cost $90 – it's free with mods, in fact with the best mods they give you the unexpected or inspiring, too.

How apt that the mag with the *Doom 3* review had the original *Doom* and graphics add-ons on the cover disc – together they are effectively *Doom 3*. The graphics are however the one positive thing. *Doom 3* is how I remember *Doom*. I don't remember *Doom* having blocky graphics, I remember it having lifelike graphics (cos they were in the mid-'90s). And so again now. But great graphics don't make a great game.

Doom 3? A good-looking mod that thinks it's a new game. You'll think you've played it before, twice (I even looked for "Dave woz ere 1994" on the back of the toilet doors) and it isn't worth the money. Without the heritage, scores would be mid-'80s at best.

David's Rating 85%

PCGA *responds: My god man, who widdled in your flask? There's no way a mod team could produce a game of the scale of* Doom *3. Hundreds of people working flat out for a year to create a tight, terrifying trip. To not like the game is one thing, but approaching things like this, no wonder you're not enjoying these games like others.*

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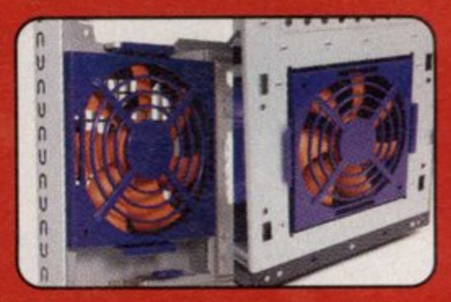

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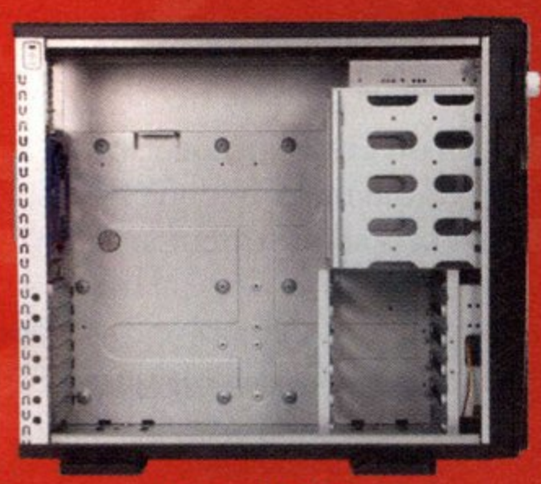

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Illustrations by **David Lyttleton**

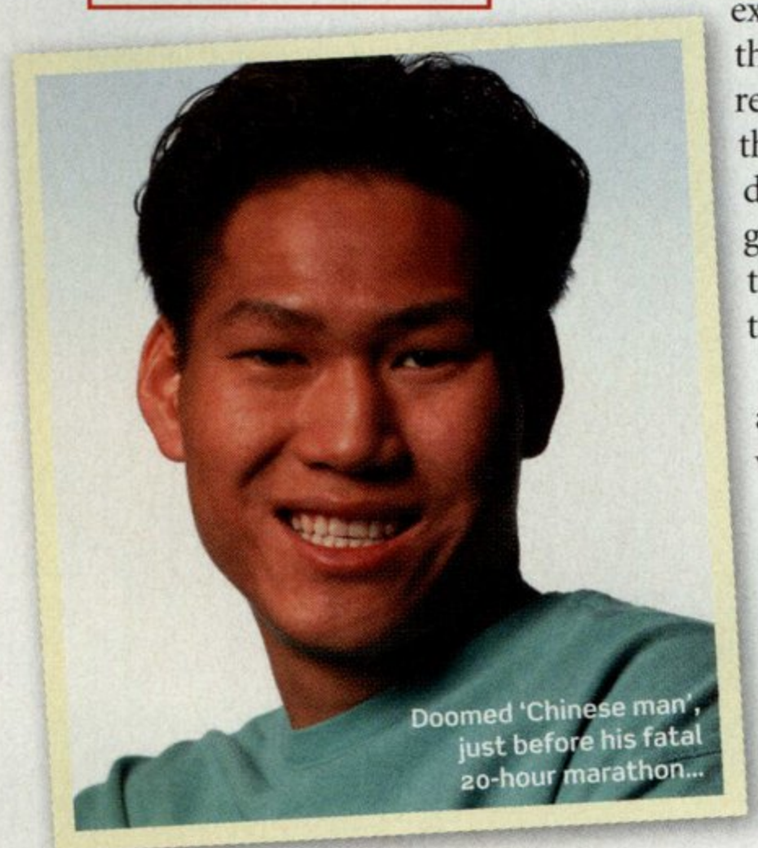
Featuring MMO addiction and killing people. Erk!

SHORTS

Every month I buy your mag, and every month I wonder how you manage to make me laugh out loud like a loon. Stop it! its getting pretty embarrassing now.
Kerby, email
We'll start using knock, knock jokes then eh?. **PCGA**

Is there a game that explains the meaning of life?
Justin van Vliet
Haha, you think escaping reality will help you understand it? **PCGA**

Do you guys think Duke Nukem Forever will see the light of day? It's been taking... Well...Forever.
Luke 'Duke' Stevens
Well, we were hoping to use it as the universal butt of all release schedule jokes, but apparently Meqon are doing the physics for it, so it's looking more likely than ever now. **PCGA**



Doomed 'Chinese man', just before his fatal 20-hour marathon...

MMOfo

I'm becoming worried for my fellow gamers, because of MMOs. Gamers always get addicted to games; we've all spent marathon sessions playing *Counter-Strike*, *Command & Conquer*, *Civilization II*, etc. How ever long we play, though, the ending is almost always in sight. The problem with MMOs is that they offer an alternative to this, and ultimately, life. They are never-ending, and the innate human interaction within these games makes them much more 'realistic' than your average offline game.

I played *EVE Online* for quite a while and it almost took over my life. The key problem here is that MMOs can often offer a much more attractive life. I would much rather be a space pirate than a poor student. And for roughly $60 a month (game subscription plus broadband) I can play to my heart's content in another world. $60 in the real world barely covers the cost of one night out.

I believe that gamers will eventually choose to live their virtual 'life' as it will be more exciting and interactive than their real life. I read a few months ago that a Chinese man died from a 20-hour gaming marathon… this is a taste of what's to come.

With the eventual advent of realistic virtual reality combined with online gaming, why would anyone choose the real world? Essentially, we'll end up in a Matrix-style system, where people will choose to be 'plugged in' rather than face reality.
Adam Jenner, email

We liked your letter - loved it really, right up to the ending. The leap from liking MMOs to plugging your life into a computer is one we're not prepared to take. Still, fair comment: $60 to visit another world is pittance. A cheap date, really. However, if you feel you're genuinely addicted, perhaps it's time to look at what you're getting out of these games that you're not getting in real life - Adventure, romance, a sense of progression. The only people in real danger here are those that have never experienced these things in their real lives. If you qualify, the get out more! **PCGA**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

It's PC to learn

Being a thinking man, I struggle with many things. Computer games based on war has been the latest issue that I have forced myself to toggle with, and I have concluded on the notion that, quite frankly, they're ace.

To create a game that is based on a subject where human beings are slaughtered might not be, on the surface, such a great idea. I contest, how can there be a more worthy homage? Instead of merely reading about the invasion of Normandy (although still worthwhile, kids!) you can live through it and, to a certain extent, go through the same things that our grandfathers did. Our appreciation for the true horrors of war can only be given more substance, our knowledge of historic military events can only be widened and our prejudices towards other nations squashed.

When I play games like *Call of Duty* I don't actually enjoy the experience, but I'm entertained and enthralled by what I am undergoing. While I would be as useful to the Armed Forces as a leper in a weights-room, I feel that I can understand the plight of war better than before I played these games. They have showed me that along with books, documentaries and movies, computer games have a role in educating people of the true horrors of war.
Gary Flavell

That's a refreshingly different take on the subject – and a positive one too. Keep in mind though, actually being shot at and watching your friend get blown to bits isn't an experience any game can recreate, thankfully. **PCGA**

ATARI

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PC GAMES ADDICT

REVIEWS

In which we put the new releases before our panel of PC gaming experts

Goodbye!

Unless you're moving to Azeroth or Norrath too...

I can't believe I'm saying this, but aside from the magic that is Half-Life 2 and all the other wonderful stuff we've covered in the last few issues, this is the time of the MMORPG. There are three big MMO games this issue, *EverQuest 2*, *Final Fantasy XI* and of course our cover game, *World fo Warcraft*. Although *FFXI* is not without its merits, it really has been a two horse race, with the other two wowwing (pun intended) gamers everywhere with innovative ideas, something the only genre to continually charge it's audience a fee to play desperately needed to win over a western audience. Now, it's actually worth paying to keep playing one of these games - my only concern is that could be a dangerous precedent to set.

Giddy from excitement with WoW, and Half-Life 2 finally in hand, it's also been a month of disappointments, as *Battle for Middle-Earth* proved to look better than it played. Still a decent game, but when a game looks that good, the let down is always hard. EA proved though that they don't deserve any sort of reputation for simply jumping on all the big licenses and cranking the cash handle though, because *Need for Speed Underground 2* is a class product that only references some celebrity T&A to help move it along - not that it needs any.

A slew of other titles arrived at the eleventh hour, and that unfortunately meant they've missed out on coverage before the Christmas rush, but with the exception of *Vampire Bloodlines* (which I'm glancing at to my left) we've covered all of what we consider to be this season's best games. Enjoy!

DAN TOOSE
EDITOR

Scrutinised this issue...

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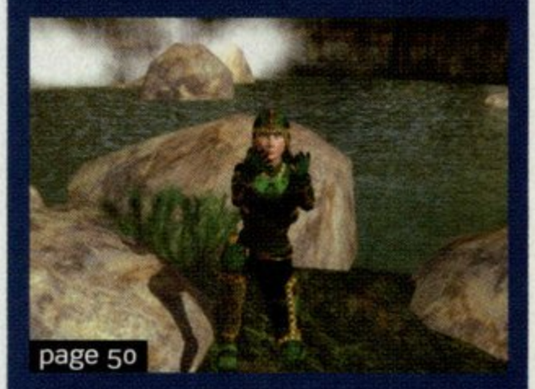
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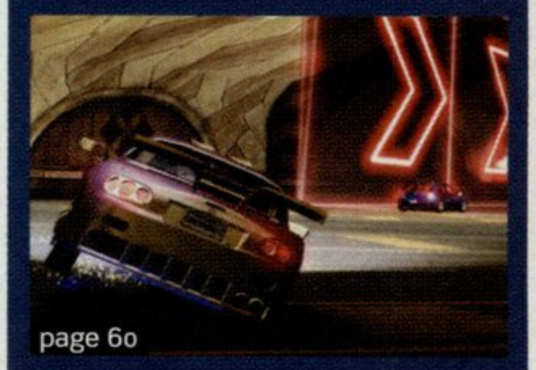
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The PCGA review rig

There's no point reviewing new games on old PCs, otherwise we wouldn't be doing them justice. After all, how can you tell how well a game runs until you've seen it on the best machine available?

That's why we've turned to Emagen. Not just because they're able to keep working with an up to date PC to put the games through their paces, but also due to the fact that we're certain that they do the best system assembly in the business. Look at the picture below and you won't find a stray ATA cable or screw out of place. If you're serious about assembling the best machine you can, you'd do well to contact Emagen.

THE PC GAMES ADDICT REVIEW MACHINE:

- AMD Athlon XP 3000+
- Asus A7N8X Deluxe
- Corsair TWINX 512MB PC3200
- 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro
- 19" Mitsubishi Flat CRT Monitor
- Western Digital WD800JB HDD
- 16X DVD, 52x24x52 CDRW
- Antec LanBoy Chassis
- Mitsubishi 104Key Black Keyboard
- Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer

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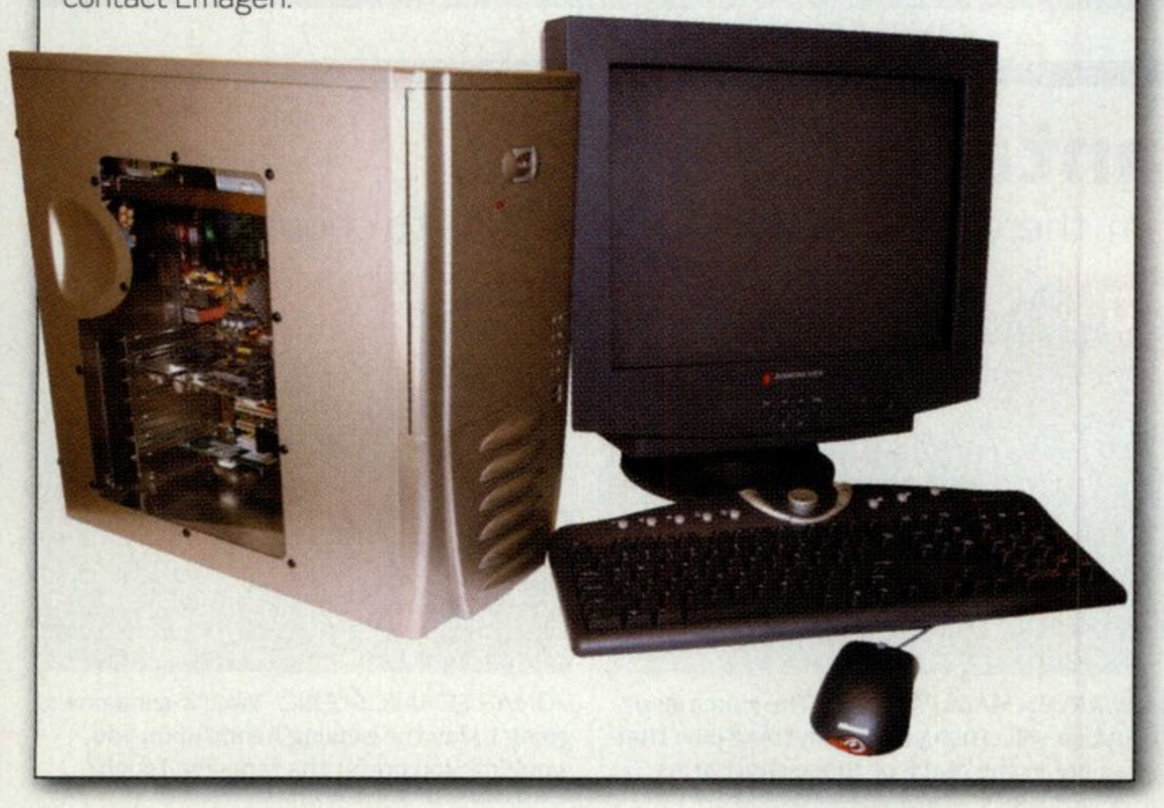


Our Scoring System Explained

0-19% ABOMINABLE
Game crime. If you see this game do not approach. Call the appropriate authorities and have it removed.

20-49% POOR
A deeply troubled and troubling effort. Think twice, even if you find it lurking in the bargain bin.

50-69% MEDIOCRE
Fans of the theme or genre can extract limited fun if they persevere. Otherwise, put your wallet away.

70-84% GOOD
Consistently enjoyable but lacks that spark of genius. Superior alternatives are usually available.

85-89% EXCELLENT
A first-class title that guarantees great gaming. Fans of the genre will revel in it.

90%+ EXCEPTIONAL
Instant classic. These games are worth trying even if you don't normally like the genre.

THE PCGA AWARD

Just as our scoring system implies, if it gets 85% or higher, it's a game worthy of your hard earned dollar. Our **GOLD GAME** award willhelp you spot games **PCGA** recommend.

PC GAMES GOLD GAME ★★★★★

RIGHT TO REPLY

Think we've treated a game unfairly? Or perhaps we've gone too easy on a game. Address your redress to **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** or write to us via snail mail by sending your correspondence to **Feedback, PC Games Addict, Derwent Howard, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355**

Review

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Quite simply, the best MMORPG ever made

PC GAMES ADDICT GOLD GAME ★★★★★

What a lovely couple these two make, but there's no marriage option in *World of Warcraft*... Yet

Thumbnail Review

The MMORPG made for everyone, not just zealots...

- ☑ Quick fix gaming
- ☑ Long haul gaming
- ☑ Gorgeous and intuitive to play
- ☒ Complicated

An amazing take on the genre that works for all types of gamers, regardless how much time they have to spare.

MAKE A MONSTER

Character creation: D-I-Y fantasy freaks

With eight races and nine character classes to choose from, there's a myriad of combinations to choose from.

UNDEAD FEMALE WARLOCK - How do you break it to the slinky young woman hitting on you that you just can't do necrophilia?

TAUREN MEN WARRIOR - A little bit bull-headed, this chap looks dashing, with all manner of cowhide skin-types available.

DWARVEN MALE PALADIN - The Hammer of Justice will crush you, or anything else that can get in the reach of those short arms...

HUMAN FEMALE CLERIC - Well, if someone's going to lay the healing hands upon you, wouldn't you prefer the feminine touch?

Astranaar
Mimwrath
Volkator
Tensumi
Simrz
Snakewife's Auto Shot hits Berserker for 34.
Ag's Curse of Agony hits Berserker for 5.
Kopenz casts Rockbiter 4 on Kopenz's Sequoia Hammer.
Ag's Curse of Agony hits Berserker for 11.
Ag's Curse of Agony hits Berserker for 11.
Akimaru dies.
Deemspring dies.
Lahu's pet begins eating a Tough Jerky.
[Guild] [Simrz]: they hunked us pretty bad then
[4. Cosmos] [Leeny] left channel.
[1. General] [Volkator]: can we kill from the other end of the city?
[Scylexan] says: run past sentinels?

A PvP raid in progress. Here we see orcs clearing out the Dark Elf lands...

You get to choose your rewards when completing quests
Conservator Ithalaine
The Balance of Nature
You performed your duties well, Cheshire.
Rewards
Choose your reward:
Choker of Kalimdor
Stormcaller Bracers
You will also receive:
Complete Quest
Cancel
Shadowglen
Conservator Ithalaine
[1. General] [North]: beta1
[1. General] [Mushi]: yes
[1. General] [Wicked]: same
[1. General] [Wicked]: <Timba
[1. General] [Adric]: i was on beta server... won the stress test contest
[1. General] [Wicked]: I was on back when the highest level was 30
[1. General] [Adric]: heh same with a few of my friends
[1. General] [Wicked]: lol wasn' so damn crowded as this

Gathriz
Health 817/666
Energy 100/100
What an aptly named creature! Look at the size of him, big enough to have a crowd surround it - thank god
The Beast
Minor Infernal
Minor Infernal
Minor Infernal
Earthbind Totem
<Epione's Creation>
With arms flapping, Dapod struts around Hkallen, Cluck, Cluck, Chicken!
Spell begins to cast Fireball.
Epione's Earth Shock was resisted by Onyxia's Elite Guard.
Magusrex begins to cast Shadow Bolt.
Burning Felhound's Mana Burn hits Morelyn for 289.
DinoBot gains 35 Happiness.
Keeper gains 19 health from Keeper's First Aid.
Lokthgar gains 3 health from Lokthgar's Fungal Regrowth.
Aph's Throw missed The Beast.
XP 17229 / 25200

Back when Blizzard announced they were canning *Warcraft Adventures*, there was a mixed reaction. For the most part, a gaming community hungry for more quality gaming was quite miffed at losing their chance to go wandering through the wilds of Azeroth and Kalimdor. There were some (myself included) that saw this as a sign that Blizzard were committed to getting it right rather than getting it out, and were extremely happy about it. Now, after losing numerous evenings to *World of Warcraft*, we're happy to report that Blizzard have finally 'got it right' and it was well worth the wait.

The number one problem with the MMORPG for the average person is that these games have been geared towards the hardcore gamer that is able to dedicate a huge chunk of their time to playing the game. That's great if you're the kind of person who has spare time, but there are people who love their games dearly, but can't spend hours every evening trying to get somewhere in a virtual life. This is where Blizzard has applied a design philosophy that clearly revolves around taking the 'bad stuff' out of a type of game to make it more accessible and enjoyable, and that's what they've done with *WoW*. As much as it will, *WoW* has been designed to ensure you don't need to give up your life to play it – and when you do play, you can play it your way.

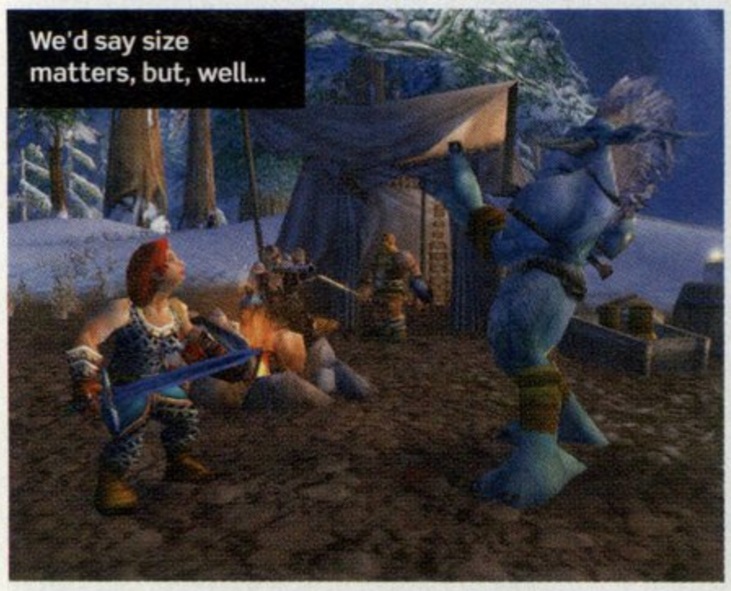
What most MMORPGs truly fail to do is instill a sense of the world being particularly dynamic and continuous, but that makes sense. After all, you can't very well have new players coming into the game only to be adventuring in a world in total turmoil, as a few constants are necessary. Instead of throwing this problem into the 'too hard' basket, Blizzard have used the story of the *Warcraft* games to their advantage to create a system that splits players into two factions, the Alliance and the Horde. Having seen off the Burning Legion at the end of *Warcraft III* the two factions have lost their common enemy and peace cannot last. What this means for us is a world where the player truly chooses a side, because the game prevents players from the Horde and the Alliance working together. They can't even send tell messages to one another, but more on the dynamics of the *World of Warcraft* later, let's start at the beginning.

The player truly chooses a side

Like in any MMORPG, the game starts with choosing a server and then creating a character that will hopefully grow into the stuff of Legends. Looking at the eight races and nine classes available in *WoW*, it may seem somewhat limited, and relative to say *EverQuest 2*, it is. However, it should be noted that aside from a couple of a few racial bonuses that work well in conjunction with certain classes, *WoW* doesn't make any particular race/class/gender combinations particularly smart or stupid. Any gamer that has ever had a character in an MMORPG that they later discovered was flawed because of its race/class combination will appreciate the fact they're not going to discover they've been 'wasting their ▶

ON THE DVD We've included screens in Galleries, and the intro movie as well > Movies

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



We'd say size matters, but, well...

Spell effects are bright and beautiful

The Infernals from Warcraft III are just as powerful and infinitely more daunting in *WoW*.

time' in *WoW*. While this may not bother RPG-heads who are used to planning out their character before they start, it opens up the way for people who want to play a character for the aesthetic, without worrying about being underpowered as a result. About the only consideration a fora player to make is if their racial traits compliment the way they want to play.

At a glance, *EQ2's* branching class system may make it seem like it boasts more depth in terms of character development, but *WoW's* talent system essentially offers the same level of diversity, with less direct 'one-way channeling' down a path. Each class has three 'schools' of talent, each pertaining to a different aspect of that class's fortes. For example, the hunter class has Marksmanship (long ranged weaponry), Beast Mastery (pet abilities and 'nature buffs') and Survival (tracking, traps, minor melee bonuses), offering a multitude of ways to specialize and generalize. Only one and a half talent 'trees' can be maxed out over the course of a career, so there's always more things to spend points on than you have. Don't think you made the right choice? Talents can be unlearned, and although it's not as easy as simply redistributing points at will, there's none of that "I've ruined my character!" in this game.

Of course, beginnings are humble in games like this, and while all the different races may all start in different corners of the world, they also start off facing the person who'll give them their first quest, and an immediate purpose in the game. Hate big expansive games you can't find something to do in? *WoW* may be expansive, but unless you avoid talking to folks boasting an exclamation mark above their head, you'll soon have a list of active quests that will keep you more than busy. Quests range from simple herb gathering through to long multi-part tasks that involve infiltrating dungeons, rescuing allies and all manner of things. Quests offer experience, and a tangible reward, and if that's an item rather than money, you get a choice! So many MMORPGs have had quests that are only useful to those who'd want the item it produces, but it's rare you'll walk away with an item that doesn't improve your character.

World of Warcraft is a gorgeous piece of eye-candy

Clever tweaks aside, *World of Warcraft* still revolves around the same basic ideals that most other MMORPGs do. You fight monsters, take quests, group, auction items, learn trades, form guilds, and all the stuff in between. It's a formula that works, and since *WoW* is a gorgeous piece of eye-candy with an intuitive interface, it works better than ever before. Beauty may be in the eye ▶

TRANSPORTATION

Land, sea & air...

If you're crossing continents, or even travelling to new ones, you won't want to do it on foot... At least, you won't want to do it using your feet. There are several options to the traveller in *WoW*

Major settlements often have a flight master, who'll be more than willing to give you a crash course in aviation so you can travel to far off lands in a flash. It's a joyride, with no control.

"Fantasy fracas with a fish..."

THANKS PET Just below the player's vital stats are those of his pet, so he can see how much longer his loyal companion can hold out. The smiley face represents just how loyal it is.

PARTY TIME! Those names to the left are the comrades that you've grouped with to form a party. It's easy to tell at a glance just how long your warrior can tank for, or if your cleric can keep healing.

PRETTY BUFF That glowing paw signifies our Orcish hero is receiving the benefits of a magical spell or power, from either a friend, or one of his own special tricks.

HEAVY LOGGING Here you can see the dialogue from all the channels the player is 'tuned' into. If you don't care for in-game banter, this can be set to show the combat log instead.

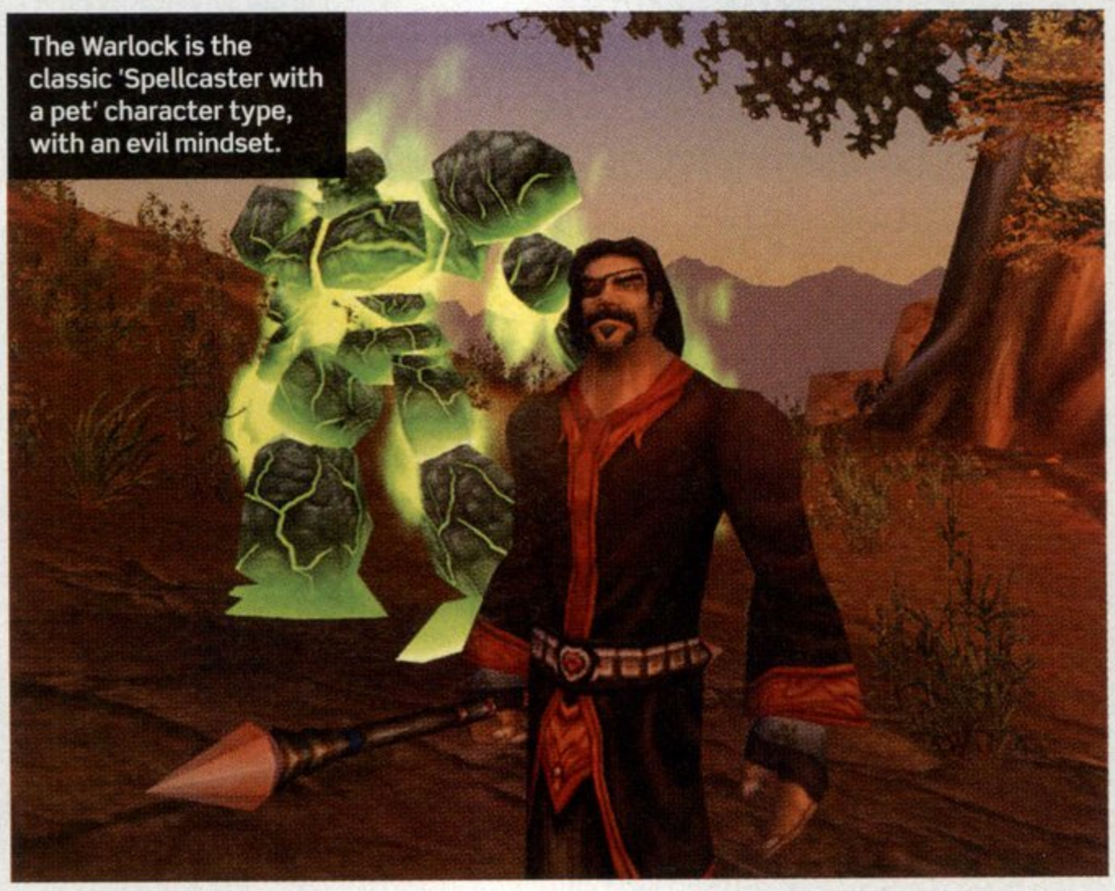
LOOK AT LATENCY Even though latency seems to be no problem at all in *World of Warcraft*, if you want to be on the safe side before going somewhere dangerous, this meter let you know it'll be safe.

Significantly slower, but still quite speedy compared to hoofing it everywhere, ships run certain routes on a regular basis to connect ports, on far and distant shores.

We saved the best for last, mounts are available to 40+ level characters, enabling them to cross vast distances much more quickly than regular plebs, who have to endure the slow slog.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

of the beholder, but you'd have to be one of those people who truly prefers faux-realism (like in *EQ2*) to a rich art style to think any other MMORPG was a patch on *WoW*. The world's inhabitants look warm and rich rather than ultra-detailed moving with an exaggerated grace (or lack there of), and while the number of animations from emotes is lower than the aforementioned *EQ2*, they boast far more charm and character. The music is equally as rich and beautiful, and the sound effects are crisp and clear, but Azeroth is a world of mutes compared to Norrath now, as there's very little in-game speech.



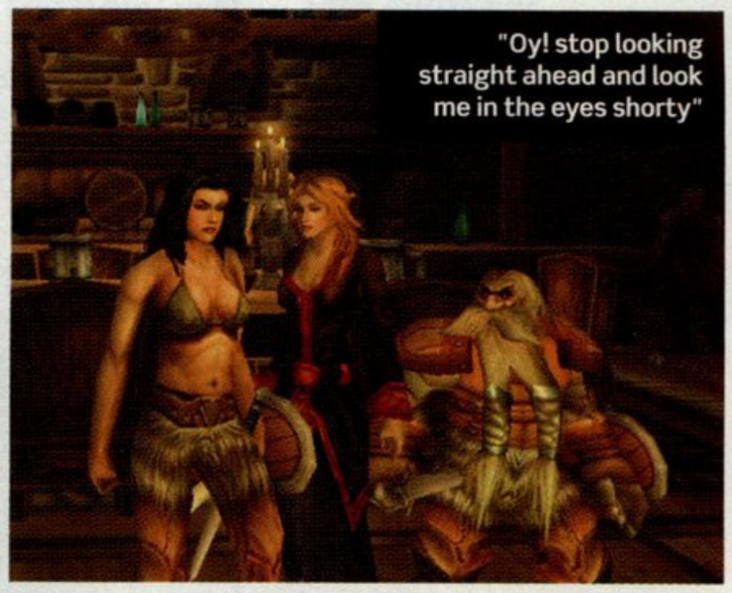
The Warlock is the classic 'Spellcaster with a pet' character type, with an evil mindset.

PvP (Player vs. Player) is a major part of MMORPGs and *WoW* takes it to new heights through the whole Alliance vs. Horde scenario. There are varying degrees of involvement a player can take in terms of PvP gaming. Even players on a non-PvP server can have a duel to see who's better in a scrap, but battles 'for keeps' can be waged out in contested (neutral) zones or even in enemy cities. That's right, you can assemble with an entourage of friends and literally take out your frustrations on your enemy's homelands. This may sound like a system that will see high-level gamers just running around ruining things for new players, but a clever 'dishonour' system has been worked in that assigns points to those that kill players more than seven levels below them. Acquire enough points and your own kind will shun you, even going so far as to not trade with your character.

Even though it would seem criminal not to want to indulge in the whole PvP experience or be a part of a daring urban raid, there are also those that will enjoy a game like *WoW* immensely, but will either be online too sporadically to have regular friends to group (form a team) with. They could also simply find the whole grouping process awkward by not being able to spend enough time to reach a group's goal, or perhaps because they're simply not interested in socialising in a game. Many MMORPGs have pretty much forced the player to group others to have a hope of completing certain quests, and sometimes simply to have a chance of getting enough experience to level. What of the stoic wandering hero? What of the loathsome undead warlock too spiteful to consort with others? *World of Warcraft* is the MMORPG that

Cheshire
Health 1 / 278
Mana 0 / 423
Twilight Vale
Greymist Seer hits Bast for 13.
Greymist Coastrunner hits you for 16.
Bast hits Greymist Seer for 11.
Greymist Seer's Lightning Shield hits Bast for 13.
Greymist Seer hits Bast for 16.
Bast hits Greymist Seer for 11.
Greymist Coastrunner hits you for 20.
You die.
XP 7373 / 12900

No not taxes, the other certainty. You can either speak to the spirit for an instant fix at a price, or find your corpse on your own for free



truly supports this. We spoke to those involved with the closed-beta that had enough time to reach level 60, and they confirmed grouping is often helpful, but is not something you ever *need* to do.

Further improvements to the whole MMORPG formula are evident in things like the auction system, which centralises the locations that people will trade items in, and Blizzard carefully chose places that aren't packed full of starting characters so as to avoid making these zones lag inherently.

To look for a fault in *WoW* feels like a stupid process, as the game is loads of fun, and it's a nitpicky thing, but Blizzard may need to take steps to adjust the costs involved for different character classes to do their thing. Warrior types have to keep shelling out to repair their weapons and armour throughout their career, while spellcasters can horde their cash, but eventually get hit by heavy reagent costs on some spells and even worse, arduous hunts to find some of them. The lofty costs involved with reagents for certain spells discourage high-level casters from buffing friendly players out of courtesy, which is the kind of positive co-operative thing that makes MMO games fun. We did notice that during the last patch, reagents were no longer needed at all on some spells, so it's evident that Blizzard are aware that this could be a problem, suggesting it won't be one that lasts.

They've really thought of just about everything. Players who haven't been online recently can gain a 'rest bonus' which gives an experience bonus. Thus, if you don't get much time to play, or haven't played in a while, the game gives you a short-term push along, so you can reach that next level a bit more quickly and catch up to your buddies. It's done in such a way that hardcore players don't suffer, it simply helps those who more often than not need it to avoid being discouraged. Even stuff that seemed tedious for those not in a guild (which the game of course offers features and support for), like using trade skills to create items for use of for profit. Even a clock-watcher like me who grumbles at any time-wasting elements in a game stops to shoot deer and rabbits with my Night Elf Hunter to keep creating scraps of leather to augment bits of his armour. Often just a trip from one town to another will give him a bonus he wasn't even looking for.

This is the third time Blizzard have moved into a new genre, and gone about redefining it in one fell swoop. They did it with *Diablo*, turning RPGs from stagnant slow-paced crawlers into progressive, action-packed dungeon romps - and before that they did it with *Warcraft*, making the sterile RTS a charming, colourful experience. *World of Warcraft* addresses almost every gripe gamers have had with the MMORPG, with the possible exception of paying a monthly fee, which quite frankly, doesn't seem that unreasonable at all when you get a game like this.

DAN TOOSE

WALKABOUT

Maps for all occasions...

Whether you're looking for distant lands or that wandering monster, *WoW* can help.

Where in the world am I? You can zoom out all the way to see both continents to find out, as well as where other lands lie.

Notice the top right area of this area map is green? That's because the map 'draws in' as you reach new areas, leaving the rest blank.

And there's the mini-map, which for characters like the Hunter can show where other creatures are lurking via skills, etc.

PC GAMES ADDICT Epic, enormous and endearing. Superb!

IT'S › Hugely immersive › Addictive › A game you play your way

IT'S NOT › Time consuming › Free › Hard to pick up

Legendary **95%**

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Vivendi ■ **Developer** Blizzard ■ **They say** 800MHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 1.8GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** Only ■ **Link** www.worldofwarcraft.com ■ **Influenced by** Warcraft III, Everquest ■ **Alternatively** EverQuest II

Review

EVERQUEST II

Help rebuild Norrath before you go to work in the morning...

Ah, where would we be without scantily clad heroines that use neglige as armour?

Thumbnail Review

Online adventuring with hundreds of friends

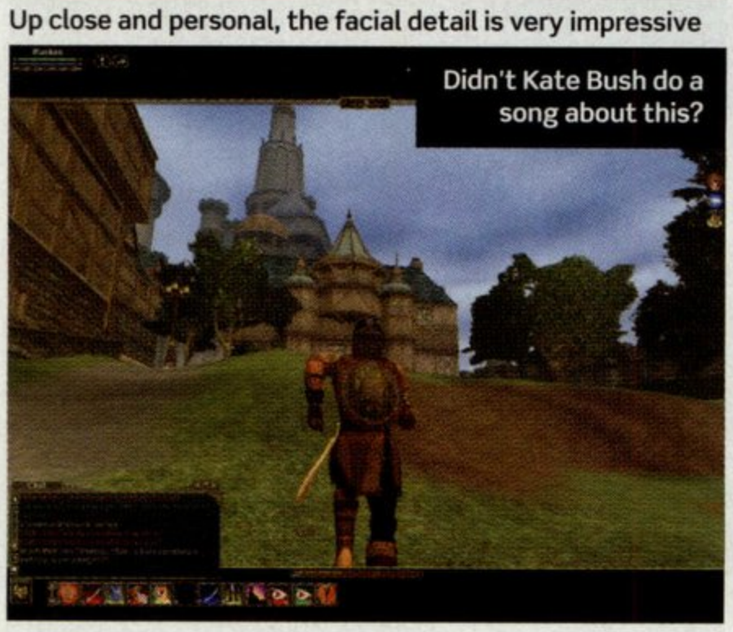
- ☑ Endless exploration
- ☑ Cackling skeletons
- ☑ Mighty swords and spells
- ☒ Player Vs Player duels

A masterful reworking of what has been the biggest western MMORPG, bar PvP failings.

The Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) has never really been a chart-busting blockbuster genre, outside of Korea anyway. Even the power of *The Sims* franchise couldn't help *The Sims Online* dominate the sales charts. So what has been the inhibiting factor for these games up until this point? A poor spread of broadband users? Intimidating gameplay? A reluctance on the part of gamers to fork out a monthly pay-to-play fee? To be honest, it's probably been all of those things. But with the release of *EverQuest II*, we sense change. In fact, we can almost smell mainstream success. *EverQuest II* has the advantage of being the sequel to a game that became notorious for its addictive qualities, and now that broadband is becoming as cheap as dial-up, the MMORPG is becoming a serious temptation to your average games consumer. The only real stumbling block is the monthly fee structure. Is *EQII* good enough to overcome this final hurdle and propel MMORPGs into the homes of casual gamers?

The character creation process is something that RPG gamers take very seriously; this is where we get to exercise our imaginations and create our virtual selves – so the more customisation the better. Single player RPGs have always offered far superior options in terms of choosing player stats, traits and finicky details, but the area in which they've been somewhat weak – customising your character's physical appearance – is where MMORPGs continue to impress. *EQII* knows that identifying yourself amongst the masses of other players is the primary concern, and thus the character creation at the start of this game primarily revolves around physical appearance – hair styles and colour, skin colour and piercings, height and build, plus a few race specific details. Depending on which race you choose, your character can look dashing, fearsome, cute or just plain weird. The starting races

Up close and personal, the facial detail is very impressive



are Human, Dwarf, Barbarian, Half Elf, High Elf, Wood Elf, Dark Elf, Erudite, Gnome, Halfling, Iksar, Kerra, Ogre, Ratonga, Troll and Froglok (although a quest is required to make the Froglok playable) so there's a lot of variety in player types from the get-go. Yes, it's an impressive selection of race types, and it's easy to endlessly deliberate over these pre-game choices. The race you choose will also determine your choice of starting city, as some races are inherently evil or good. Decide to play as a gnarled looking Troll, and you're destined to begin your game in the corrupt city of Freeport. Decide to be a Dwarf, and you'll be starting your adventures in the city of the good-willed, Qeynos. The only real qualm players may have is that there is no distribution of stat points across starting attributes or any other RPG style character trimmings. Physical appearance and alignment are your only two real choices.

So what of player class? In a clever design decision, players don't have to decide on which class they must play until they reach the Island of Refuge, after the game's initial tutorial on a boat at sea. The initial archetypes are the good old Fighter, Mage, Priest, Scout and Artisan. Choose one, and you'll eventually be granted the choice to branch off into more powerful sub-classes as you level up. A Priest, for instance, can eventually become a Cleric, Druid or Shaman

– each of those having another two levels of prestige, such as a Cleric having the choice to become a Templar or Inquisitor. Each combination of class and race type also determines which traits and abilities you are offered upon levelling, so two players that choose the same class path might end up with different spells and/or have strengths in different areas. Sony Online Entertainment has taken a small risk with automating much of this leveling up process, but the benefit it does have is allowing players to continue on adventuring without wasting time deliberating over character micro-management. It's a streamlining process that actually works in the game's favour. Clearly, the social aspect of adventuring with your friends is the primary focus, and taking the introspective noodling out of the game does successfully keep you focused on questing and interacting with the world. Of course, there's still excitement in leveling up, and all players will revel in their newfound abilities to wear better armour, equip new spells and brandish new weapons. The lure of leveling up is still an intense focus in an online game such as *EverQuest II*, and it's crucial to seeing some of the game's best content, so that thrill will never die.

There's always something to do...

Each class also has a very specific role to play in grouped combat, and regardless of what you choose to play in *EverQuest II*, you'll find your skills will be in demand by other players intent on questing themselves to glory. It feels that no player will ever feel on the outer in this sequel, as the game balance has been carefully matched to the array of character types, and we never found any particular class being excluded in favour of another.

The crowning achievement with *EverQuest II* is just how true it is to its name. The sheer number and variety of quests available is quite phenomenal. Although your quest log can only hold 50 quests at any one time, you'll regularly stumble upon opportunity after opportunity in your adventures. If it were possible, you could have something close to 200 active quests at any one time. Yes, there is a lot to do. It's also the way you acquire quests that makes the adventuring all the more fun. Some quests are naturally handed out by NPCs, but you can also discover objectives by examining objects found in the game world, or looking more closely at books on shelves or items dropped by monsters. You'll find that no matter which zone you're in, there's always something to do and there's always somewhere you want to take your character to explore. *EverQuest II* is bursting with so much content, that there's never a dull moment. The variety of the questing also helps to ▶

EVERQUEST II

Rat-slaying may be dull to do, but it's certainly not dull to look at in *EQ2*

"Hey aren't you David Blaine?"

Just like *WoW*, name tags float above heads

keep the gaming fresh across many hours of game time. From killing 'X' number of monsters, to finding magical items, collecting rare rock shards, completing creature mastery quests, fulfilling access missions to grant yourself entrance to new locations, harvesting resources and crafting items, to all sorts of NPC courier quests and exploration tasks, your time spent in *EQII* will always be busy. This is how it achieves the level of addiction that it does – it's the classic scenario of "I'll just do this, and then I'll go to bed", only to find that the sun is coming up and you're going to be dragging yourself off to work, bleary eyed and yet still churning over events in your head and figuring out how to best complete those darstardly objectives. *EQII* could easily have the richest level of content in any online game currently available. It also means that solo-play in *EverQuest II* is almost as satisfying as involving yourself in group play. Groups will tend to find it easier to level-up thanks to the experience you can rack up fighting tougher monsters, but there's enough vibrancy and detail in the game to keep solo players just as hooked for hours on end.

Groups will tend to find it easier to level-up

With its streamlined and user-friendly interface (not to mention just how highly customisable it all is), keeping track of all your quests is a breeze, and the game also alerts you when you stumble across a quest item or kill the correct monster. Everything is logged, and just about everything can be right-clicked for further information or interaction. Right-click another player and you are given a handy drop down menu, allowing you to do everything from inviting them to group with you to simply inspecting what items they have equipped. It's an exceptionally easy interface to use and with the addition of the simple combat toolbar across the bottom of your screen, even taking part in epic battles is as efficient as you are in arranging your own combat spells and abilities.

Combat in *EverQuest II* is a whirlwhind of fluid and attractive character animations, and yet it also offers a surprising amount of actual depth and control. Although actions are simply queued, the order in which you use your various attacks or buffs can have a serious affect on the outcome of a battle. This is mainly to do with the inclusion of a Heroic Opportunity system. Certain spells and attacks can be combined to complete combo chains that trigger extra offensive or defensive spells. These can be achieved solo or in a group, but obviously in a group they can be executed more often and require players to be more observant of their teammates' actions and to co-operate in order to acquire these combat winning Opportunities. Successful spells might grant the entire party a life-

BROWSER BARBARIANS

A Window Into The Soul

Even when you're not logged into the game, you can inspect every other player that is...

Just head to http://eq2players.station.sony.com/ to access the player rankings and search engine.

Search a player name or click on one in the rankings to see all their stats, portrait and what gear they currently have equipped!

SOE provides every guild with their very own free website. Use it totrack your teammates and current guild stats & status in the game.

Every single discovered item can also be examined and called up from a massive item database direct to your browser.

"Your window to the world of Norrath"

HOME SWEET HOME The fair city of Qeynos looms in the background, reassuring us that safety is but a drawbridge away. This Keep you see from the fields of Antonica can be explored in the zone of North Qeynos.

CHICKEN RUN Think you're going to lose the battle? Use the 'cry for help' command and run as fast as you can back to the NPC guards at the gate to this city and they'll slay the beasts that are pursuing you.

OUR HERO This fighter is on his way to becoming a Paladin. Soon he might be able to trade that short sword for a hefty two-handed claymore and dispense with the little buckler altogether. Then it might be time to get a suit of shiny armour to impress the ladies.

BAG OF TRICKS Here you can easily mix and match your inventory items. The stronger you are, the more slots become available for lugging stuff around. See the green egg? A pet baby Dragon is going to hatch out of that pretty soon.

DIRTY VERMIN This pitiful moat rat is no match for our fighter, but sometimes a tooth or a tail might be a handy ingredient or a necessary quest item. The 'con' system shows its name in grey, meaning it's no threat.

CLICK TO VICTORY The easy-to-use combat bar allows you to map whichever spells and abilities you want access to during combat and you can scroll through as many sets of these as you need. The experience progress bar above it lets you keep track of how close you are to leveling.

saving heal, or smite the entire monster group you're fighting with lightning strikes. It's an effective and highly satisfying system that really adds a whole new dimension to the combat. Combat encounters are now also locked to the player or group that initiated combat, preventing other players from stealing kills. Combat rewards can be set to a lotto system, allowing players in a group to bid on the items that interest them, with the result determined by a random roll of the dice. Of course, with almost everything else in *EverQuest II*, there are multiple options, so set it to free-for-all if you'd prefer to bicker over the possession of items instead.

EverQuest II also boasts some truly beautiful incidental character animation. In what looks like motion-captured movements, player emotes are multiple, combat is dynamic and even NPCs and non-threatening wildlife seem truly alive and responsive. All the NPCs are also fleshed out with voice acting – that's right, every character you come across is fully voiced - surely a first for any online RPG. NPCs will wave and beckon to you when they want to talk, enemies will cower and shield their faces if they can sense you are of greater power, and we just love the way monsters tongue-lash you in combat, especially the way the undead continue to cackle with delight as you hack them to pieces (I guess they know they can never really die, right?). It's impressive enough that *EverQuest II* is as pretty a game as it is, but with all this extra depth in the interaction with the gameworld, the virtual world of Norrath feels astoundingly alive, and for that very reason you'll feel compelled to continue questing until you've uncovered every single inch of it.

With its user-friendly interface, gorgeous graphics, endless questing opportunities, dynamic combat, amazingly huge world rich in content, and a learning curve that makes role-playing a breeze for gamers new to online gaming, there's no reason why *EverQuest II* can't be an even bigger success than the first *Everquest*. If it doesn't dominate the top the charts at some stage then it's a crying shame.

ELIOT FISH

PC GAMES ADDICT Addiction has a brand new name

IT'S › Visually gorgeous › Time consuming › Endlessly engaging

IT'S NOT › A cheap addiction › A healthy substitute for a social life

Everlasting

92%

■ **Price** $89.95 (plus 30 day free trial) ■ **Release** Out Now ■ **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Sony Online Entertainment ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, Dx9 compatible video card ■ **We say** 2GHz or greater CPU, 1GB RAM, Dx9 video card, broadband ■ **Multiplayer** Internet only ■ **Web** everquest2.station.sony.com ■ **Influenced by** Everquest ■ **Alternatively** World of Warcraft

THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Will it be Dwarfed by the opposition?

Rarely does a game feel this frustrating. Here's an example: my Rohirrim archer cavalry are piling arrow after arrow into Mordor's dark towers. They sit out of range, laughing to themselves at impotent orcs cut down as the fortifications crumble. Right click, move on to attack the next. Without warning my men rush in to the fray, disobeying my direct orders. They're cut down instantly. Their corpses left to rot in Middle-Earth's mud.

Or try this, an early level: the Rohirrim are on the attack again. There are no flaming arrows this time round, but the buildings spew back fire, wilting my attackers. Meanwhile, at the back of the base an Uruk Pit streams out enemy infantry leaving my archers vulnerable. The only tactic: continually produce cavalry to counter, using them to charge in and out, nullifying the computer's dumb, dumb spawning. This takes half an hour. I sit, clenching teeth, tearing at the mouse, praying they make it. At last, they do. VICTORIOUS! My score is totted up, clearly I'm an orc crushing god. Then it's on to the next mission: exactly the same scenario; exactly the same problems; requiring exactly the same solution. Except this time the darkened coal background has been replaced with grassland.

Or maybe this: playing as Mordor, I've isolated a Rohan outpost. The men inside cower at my mighty ballistae as they ravage the outside walls. With the defences down, siege ladders are deployed, enabling Uruk-hai to scale the walls. But an ominous pot of dynamite sits to one side, waiting for a match or flaming arrow. The spark hits, blowing the wall apart and sending the wretched elves manning the turrets spinning to their doom. At once it's thrilling, spectacular and utterly violent.

Cavalry will carve through feeble infantry. Cave trolls are another matter.

Thumbnail Review

Relive the battles from either side of the Uruk pikes

- ☑ Hobbits
- ☑ Wizards
- ☑ Orcs
- ☒ Space Marines

Shoddy AI and bizarre design destroy any sense of atmosphere created by the astonishing presentation.

How can this be? How can something this beautiful be found in something this flawed?

The only thing left after an extended stay in Middle-Earth is frustration. Frustration with a game that should have been so outstanding, that should have been one of the finest strategy games of the year. Frustration that the world's largest publisher has imposed their impossibly high production standards onto a game that doesn't deserve the licence. Beneath the flash, the sampled voices, orchestral score, magnificent landscapes and monstrous animation lies a mess of inexplicable design decisions, bizarre mechanics, Fisher Price strategy and a strange disregard for Tolkien's story.

When two armies clash you're drawn in

The good: this game is immediately engaging. When two armies clash you're drawn in to the screen, into the combat. While the game never approaches the scale of the armies in *Rome: Total War* (or indeed the lavish *LotR* promotional screenshots), it is still beautiful. It's to do with sound, mostly. You're surrounded by the noise of war: screams, violence and industry. Every moment drips atmosphere, be it skirmishing in the driving rain of Rohan or creeping through the Mines of Moria, driving out Goblins, Cave Trolls and the mighty Balrog.

Meanwhile, much of the traditional real-time strategy fat has been stripped away, leaving nothing but war. Resource management has been vastly simplified compared to *Warcraft* or even *WH40K: Dawn of War*. If you want cash, build a farm, a foundry, or a lumber mill. There's no need to worry about sending peons out to harvest: they'll happily produce goods in situ. More good: there's no worrying about balancing your supplies. Each encampment produces a catch-all currency, there is no specific wood, iron or food, just cash. The result of this is a pure focus on combat. Gaining a foothold is less about the economy and more about gathering a mixed brigade of troops and sending them ▶

FABLED

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes...

The heroes are gathering, but what use are they in the forthcoming battle?

Treebeard and the Ents will appear at Entmoots when Rohan is attacked. Unfortunately, they prove to be about as useful as a twig at Mount Doom.

"So much for the defences..."

PARTY ON You're allowed to combine two units of infantry into one larger group. The problem comes when they're being peppered with arrows – if the archers in the pack are just out of range, the front units will happily sit and take damage. The computer has an annoying knack for taking advantage of this inconsistency.

WHITE FLAG The first upgrade purchased for any of your troops should be the banner carrier. Along with a leadership bonus, the flag will automatically heal your troops. If you're taking a beating, retreat and regroup.

FLAME WARS If you're attacking a village, do pay for the flaming arrow upgrade for your crossbow men. Otherwise, you'll be stuck for hours, turning rogue rural communities into a pincushion.

STAFF SERGEANT Pikemen are your first line of defence against the vicious Rohan cavalry. The first charge will knock your Uruks off their feet, but they'll dust themselves off, and start poking the horses with their pointy sticks.

Saruman the white wizard will fling globes of fire, knocking the incoming troops straight off their feet. Kills all known Elves, dead.

Legolas is a bit like William Tell, with pointy ears. Stand him on top of your defensive walls and let him kebab Uruks from a distance.

THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

The eye of Sauron roams the battlefield, groaning about "Seeing You". He's all mouth and no arms.

forward. Even more good: the interface that manages this army is spectacular. It feels object orientated rather than menu driven. If you want a new collection of Uruk-hai, just click on their pit and an icon will appear. One more click, and your horde is born.

Best of all, emphasis is placed on upgrading your troops. When resources are plentiful you can invest in stronger armour, sharper weapons and a banner to promote your cause. The banner is pivotal. When the White Hand of Mordor, (or the Horse's Head of Rohan) is raised, your troops will automatically heal in their spare time.

Your army is born of these concepts. First a fortress and a workshop, then your tools: a division or so of infantry, some cave-trolls and Ents, accompanied by a hero. Then, to war. And then the frustration hits.

The opposition AI appears not to have evolved since the original *Command & Conquer* arrived ten years ago. The computer will happily dribble out small groups of troops to die fruitlessly against your defences. Streams and streams of basic infantry will bash up against your walls before being quickly struck down without you lifting a finger. After skirmishing against extraordinary silicon minds on the battlefields of *Rome* or the *Warhammer* worlds this is a major disappointment.

Pity Boromir, he's lunch for the marauding cave trolls. Those two hobbits are your precious objective. Crush, kill, capture.

More: the numbers in your army are limited by your 'command points' and the 'veterancy' of your barracks. Command points are accrued during the game in response to capturing areas of Middle-Earth. By the time you're knocking on the walls of Helm's Deep you can control masses of soldiers but early on you're limited to six or seven groups.

The problem comes when playing as the Rohan, taking on the forces of Mordor. There's a huge, gaping design hole here. Only the upgraded troops, such as archers with the flaming arrow upgrade, will cause any damage. Yet, once enough men have been purchased to upgrade the barracks, you've hit the army numbers limit.

The only option is to cull your older troops in suicidal attacks that have little purpose other than to create room for the new guys. No wonder the peasants look so reluctant to serve under Eomer.

Here is a more fundamental fault. There is precious little strategy in this strategy game. Battles are won through the sustained, inexorable pressure of force and little else. Quick wits rarely factor. Why? It's partly

"And they call this a mine... a mine!"

Mines of Moria tour: Open now. You have to be taller than this line for entry.

The goblins first attack across the bridge. They're quickly dispatched with a few sword swipes from Boromir and Aragorn. The hobbits stand back, chucking rocks.

The Cave Troll is a major disappointment. He's knocked back by a few blasts from Gandalf's staff, before Gimli wades in with his axe.

Then comes the Balrog. Gandalf is barely affected by the assault, banishing horn-head to the depths. Hang on, this isn't what we remember.

Dozens of crossbow bearing Uruks are needed to bring down an Ent. Orc rush!

Buildings are placed on the grey circles within camps. Defensive forts are rare.

down to the lack of significantly interesting units. Cavalry charge at the enemy and little else. Infantry wade in. Archers or crossbowmen deal out damage from afar. It's left to the heroes – such as Gandalf, Boromir or Legolas to add some spice. They don't. Keeping them close to your troops can prove useful: they do more damage when a local legend is by their side, but fundamentally, most of their abilities come down to this: they're units with a bigger health bar, and the ability to kill any conventional unit in one hit. That's all.

This is supposed to be a fantasy battlefield, a place defined by imagination. The lack of it shown in character development is near shameful. What's more, using the one-hit wonders is a trial, even using the keyboard shortcuts. The shortcomings of these powers are blatantly demonstrated during the occasional missions where you control a small group of heroes. The opening level, where you control Gandalf in the face of the Balrog, is a good example. This should be a pivotal moment, the defining encounter of the Fellowship.

In *Battle for Middle-Earth*, it's a disaster. This is the literal extent of your involvement. Click power icon a. Click Balrog. Click power icon b. Click Balrog. Wait for the recharge. Repeat. Win.

Yet this must be repeated: there *are* some astonishing moments. Sieges remain next to perfect. The humans nearly always find themselves at the pointy end of an Uruk pike advance, so must retreat. Manning the walls with flame arrows and trebuchets, pinning back siege ladders and battering rams is a simple pleasure, directing that assault close to sublime. Such attacks follow a ritual: first catapults wear down the defences before the attack. Then come the explosive charges, dragged into place by a pair of Uruks. That's the moment to counter. Any flame reaching the barrel will cause it to erupt, scattering armies of both sides to the four corners of the screen. Some levels even enable you to hammer nearby towers, causing them to crash through the walls, creating a jagged gap. If only the rest of *Battle for Middle-Earth* could live up to these brief, memorable sorties.

A beautiful yet sadly average strategy game

And that's the problem. *Battle for Middle-Earth* has *so much* to live up to. It's the first real chance for the spirit of the books and the films to be reflected in a PC game. The massive backdrop of *Middle-Earth* has been squandered, producing a beautiful, yet sadly average strategy game, no more.

This game doesn't love its source material, as *Rome* or *Dawn of War* does. It doesn't love the source material as much as you or I. And that's the biggest frustration of all.

TIM EDWARDS

PC GAMES ADDICT **Beautiful to watch more than play**

IT'S › Flawed › A major disappointment › Immaculately presented

IT'S NOT › Precious › Complex › Intelligent

Hobbled

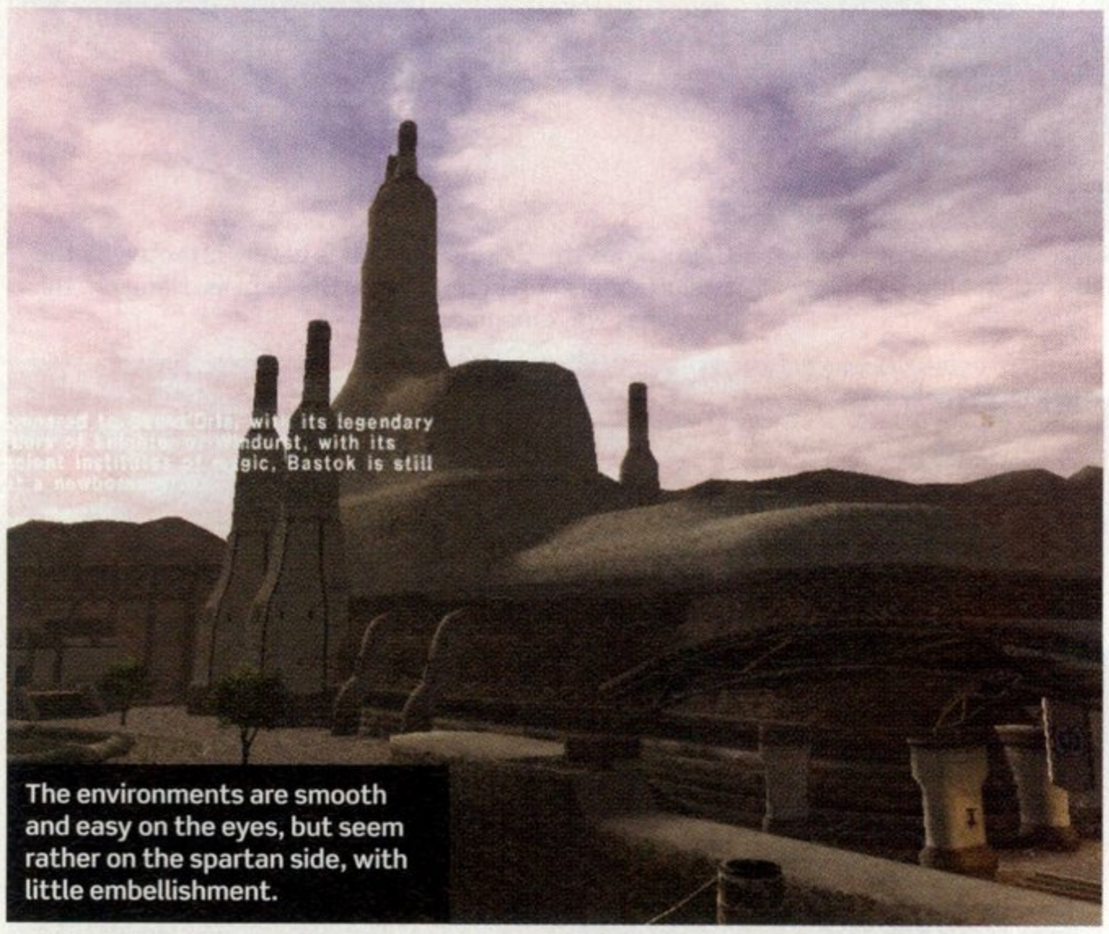
76%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ■ **Developer** In-house ■ **They say** 1.3GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** 8 Players, LAN, Internet ■ **Link** www.eagames.com/official/lordoftherings ■ **Community** mec.ogresnet.com ■ **Influenced by** C&C: Generals, Warcraft 3 ■ **Alternatively** Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

Review

FINAL FANTASY XI

Final Fantasy Online: the final frontier



The environments are smooth and easy on the eyes, but seem rather on the spartan side, with little embellishment.

Keen on MMORPGS but tired of the death and gore? Try fishing...Though it may have the same result

Over the years, there have been very few RPG stones the *Final Fantasy* series has left unturned, so, in the end, it was inevitable that Square Enix turn its attention away from the more prosaic forms of the genre and onto that wild, tricksy place: the Internet.

Thumbnail Review

Elvaan and Mithra and Tarutaru, oh my!

- [x] Killer views
- [x] Killer bunnies
- [x] Archetypes
- [ ] Novelty

Nice to look at, and fun to take for a test drive, but not strong enough to maintain interest

Your average modern MMORPG is an unusual beast. There's a growing, competitive market out there, and with giants such as *EverQuest II* and *World of Warcraft* on the way, any developer would be hard-pressed to come up with anything that shone brightly enough to catch the attention of the average MMO junkie. *Final Fantasy XI*, however, has two major cards up its sleeve: the *Final Fantasy* brand itself and the fan base it brings, and also the Square Enix knack for producing extremely lush cinematic graphics to bring their world's alive.

As every gamer knows, however, graphics do not a perfect gaming experience make, and unfortunately, *FFXI*, as well as falling a little short on that score, contains very little else in the way of innovation to keep players completely entertained beyond the first month of play.

The very first impression players receive from the game is far from reassuring. The registration process is long and cumbersome, involving installation of PlayOnline, which then becomes the portal for the game. Even getting into the game itself is an exercise in arduousness.

Once there, you can finally enter the character creation process. Usually this is quite fun, and in *FFXI*, the character models themselves are very pretty and detailed, but the range of customisation is severely limited, resulting in an online world populated by avatars which are very nice to look at, but practically clones of one another. Also, as you are creating your character, it will move around, making it very hard to see clearly what the changes you are making look like.

There are five races to choose from, each with slightly different attributes to make it an 'ideal' race for one of the available jobs: Hume, which is the basic, versatile 'human' race; Galka, which are strong beast-men who make good fighters; Elvaan, which, surprise surprise, are an elven-looking race, ideal for

THE AMAZING RACE

Who did you wanna be when you grew up?

How to look real purty, in that girly-Final-Fantasy-esque kinda way

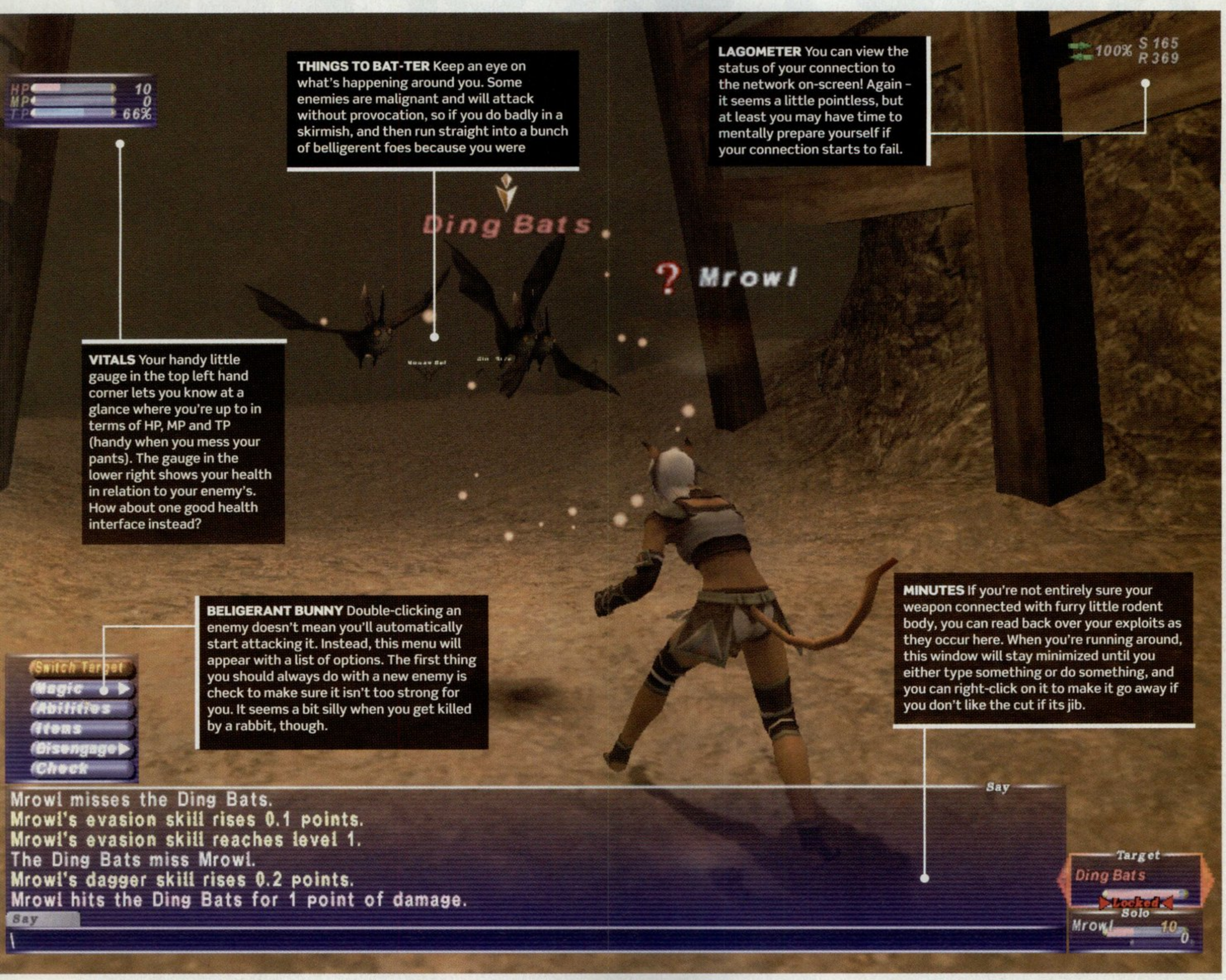
True to form, the only way you can get a masculine-looking Elvaan is if you pick the one with a beard. Gender crisis... Argh!

Of course, if that doesn't appeal, you can always take the role of the Incredible Hulk... er... Galka. So manly it sprouts hair

For those to whom size doesn't matter, perhaps a diminutive and impossibly saccharine Tarutaru is the answer

And where would any MMORPG be without the requisite gratuitous butt-shot? Helloooo, sailor!

"Not *that* Bat Cave..."



THINGS TO BAT-TER Keep an eye on what's happening around you. Some enemies are malignant and will attack without provocation, so if you do badly in a skirmish, and then run straight into a bunch of belligerent foes because you were

LAGOMETER You can view the status of your connection to the network on-screen! Again – it seems a little pointless, but at least you may have time to mentally prepare yourself if your connection starts to fail.

VITALS Your handy little gauge in the top left hand corner lets you know at a glance where you're up to in terms of HP, MP and TP (handy when you mess your pants). The gauge in the lower right shows your health in relation to your enemy's. How about one good health interface instead?

BELIGERANT BUNNY Double-clicking an enemy doesn't mean you'll automatically start attacking it. Instead, this menu will appear with a list of options. The first thing you should always do with a new enemy is check to make sure it isn't too strong for you. It seems a bit silly when you get killed by a rabbit, though.

MINUTES If you're not entirely sure your weapon connected with furry little rodent body, you can read back over your exploits as they occur here. When you're running around, this window will stay minimized until you either type something or do something, and you can right-click on it to make it go away if you don't like the cut if its jib.

fighting and magery; Mithra, which are cat-women, light, agile and adept at thievery; and finally, Tarutaru, the über-cutesy little-people race, whose skills tend towards magecraft.

The back story really isn't all that important to the actual gameplay. Basically, it provides an excuse for players to actively participate in changing the fate of the world through quests which can be received from NPCs. There are also quests available on a grander scale, allowing the player to go forth and carve out new territory, and additional missions with it.

The music is a banal wash of ambient loops

All this is fairly standard fare for MMORPG gameplay. One thing, however, that will take quite a bit of getting used to is the default control system. Rather than using the typical WASD system to move, players control their characters with the numeric keypad. If the player starts typing on the keyboard itself, the game will automatically default to the chat window. The player can also use the mouse to click-drag the character, but this is rather awkward, so it's best just to use the mouse to control the very ornery camera system.

The largest disappointment the game features lies in the two things Square Enix games are renowned for: the graphics and the music. The music is a banal wash of ambient loops that drone on in a maddening manner, while the graphics – pretty as they are – really don't seem to offer the jaw-dropping, cutting-edge creativity we've come to expect from the venerable *Final Fantasy*.

FFXI is a pretty enough game, but just seems sadly lacking in soul. Once players have the hang of the kooky control system, the gameplay is solid enough, and the fundamental elements for an enjoyable RPG are in place. It simply pales in comparison to some of the other MMORPGs about to hit the market. Anyone interested in a truly top-notch online experience should probably turn to *EQII* instead.

MICHELLE STARR

PC GAMES ADDICT Too light and fluffy to satiate

IT'S › Enjoyable › Pretty › Worth a look

IT'S NOT › Smooth sailing › Deep › EverQuest 2 or World of Warcraft

Complacent

72%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Square-Enix ■ **They Say** 800MHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 1.5GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card, broadband ■ **Multiplayer** Only ■ **Link** www.playonline.com/ff11us ■ **Community** www.playonline.com/communityus/link/ff11/tool.html ■ **Influenced** by EverQuest, Dark Age of Camelot ■ **Alternatively** EverQuest II

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

The semi-legal just became twice as much fun

PC GAMES GOLD GAME ★★★★★

Thumbnail Review

Quality console-style racing, now in a freeform city

- ☑ Smoking tyres
- ☑ Smoking neon
- ☑ Smoking hip-hop
- ☒ Smoking pipes

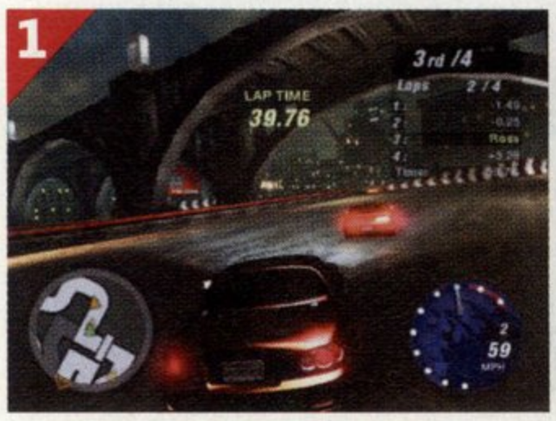
Sequel improvements and additions make this one of the best racing titles available on PC. It's dope! Or something.

Bayview's Vegas-like city centre holds no fear for BobbySpeed.

GO GO GO!

The fast and the occasionally grumpy

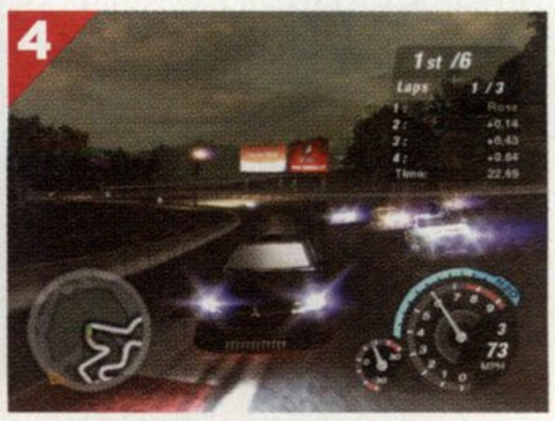
NFSU2 throws a few new race types into the brew to keep ardent fans on their toes



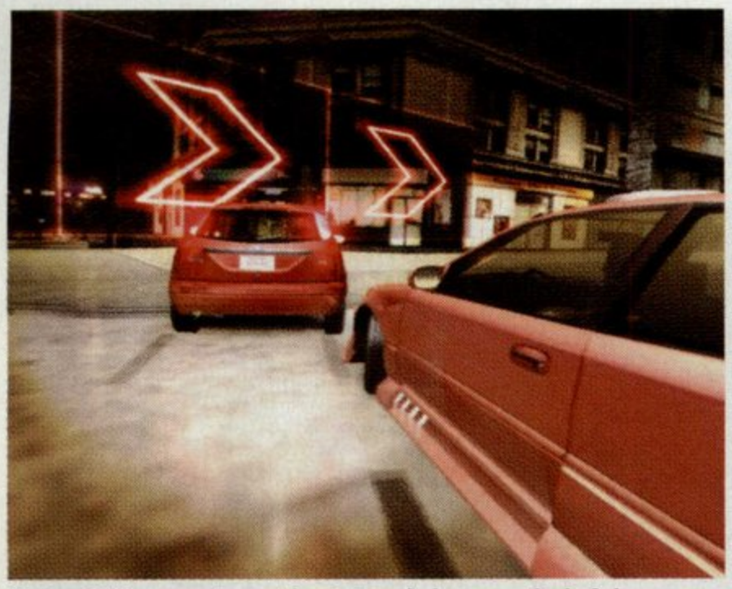
STREET X is the dramatic name given to short-course circuit races on dedicated tracks between four cars.

OUTRUN is more an individual challenge you can make with other racers, who roam the city map looking for trouble.

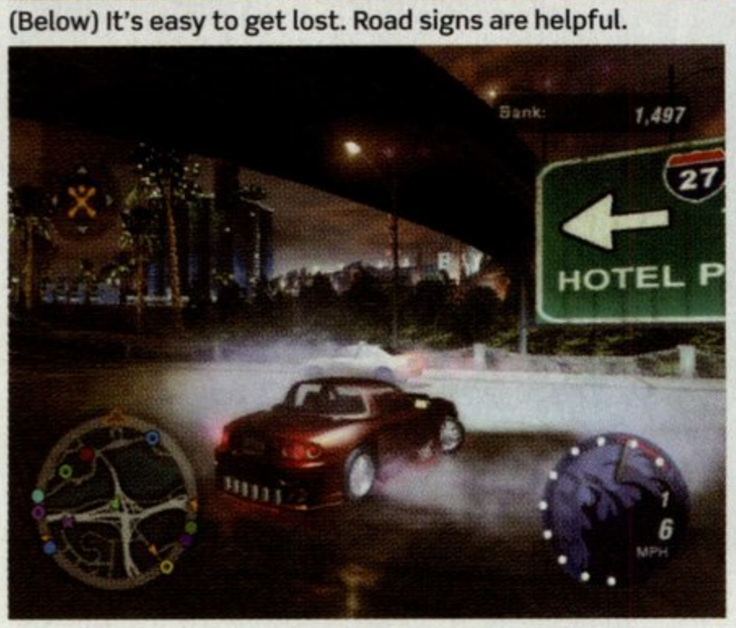
DOWNHILL DRIFT is the hardest race that demands controlled skids, downhill, with oncoming traffic. Big in Japan, apparently.

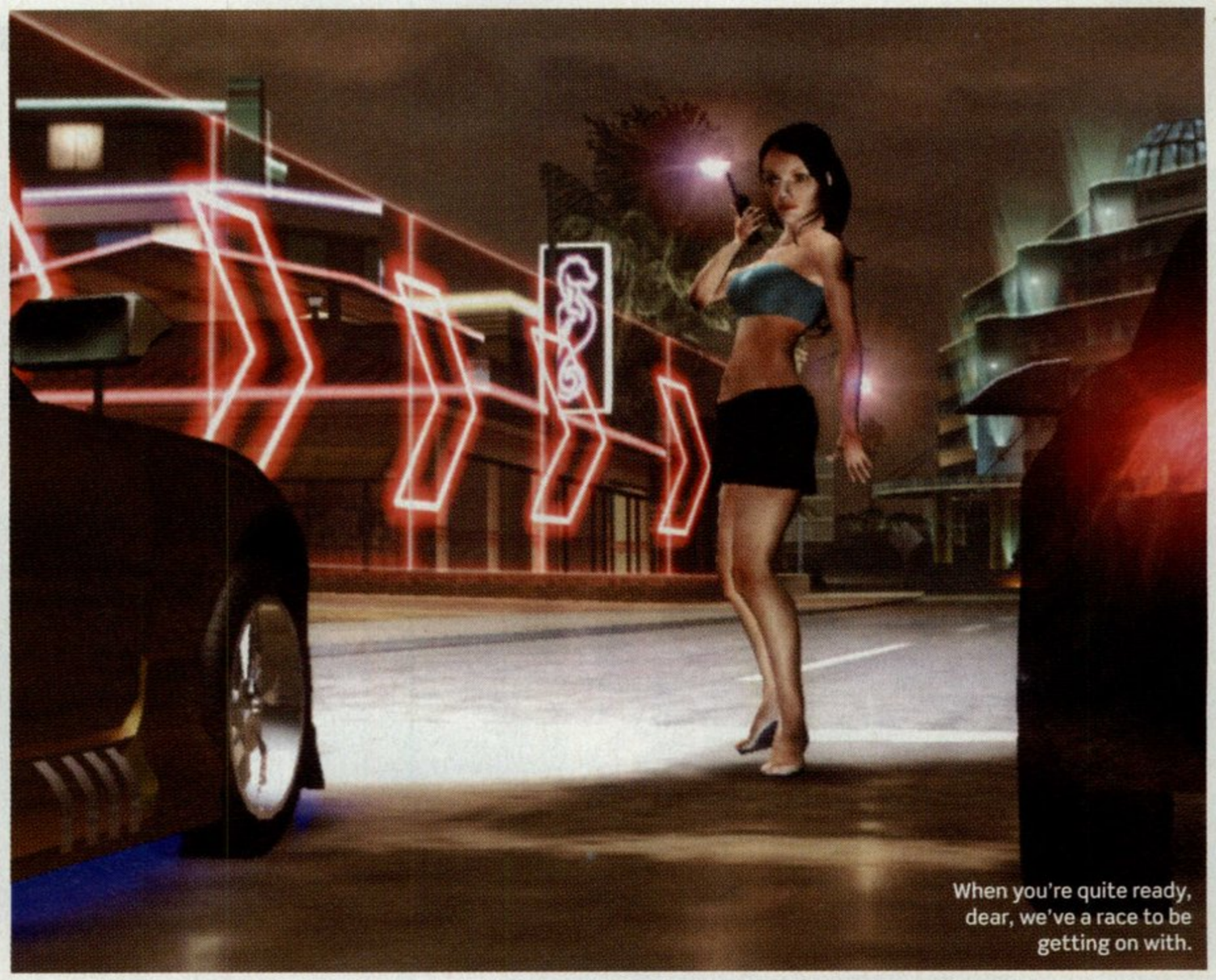


UNDERGROUND RACING LEAGUE These races on dedicated high-speed tracks feel more like *V8SC2* – not the best addition.



(Below) It's easy to get lost. Road signs are helpful.



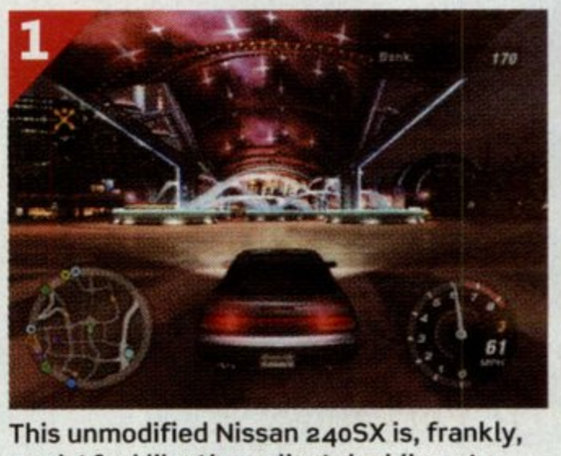


When you're quite ready, dear, we've a race to be getting on with.

RACE FACE

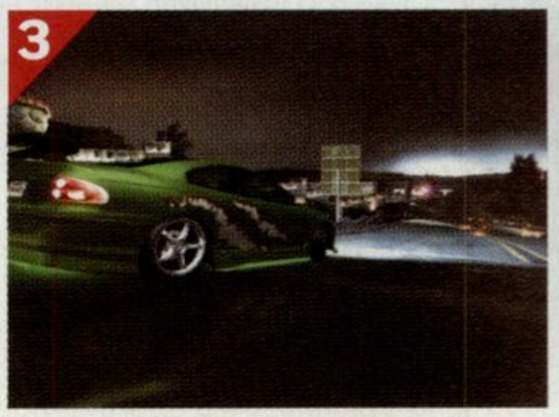
All in good taste

It's OK to be fast, but your car needs to look good

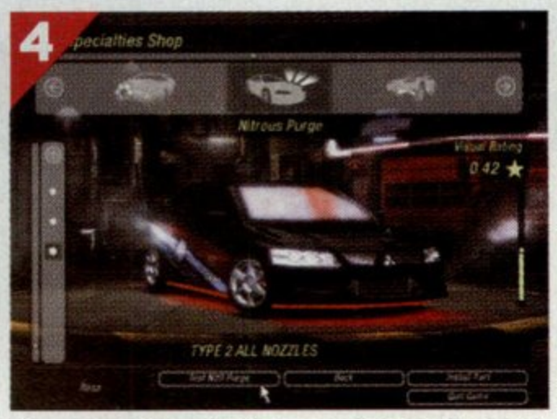


This unmodified Nissan 240SX is, frankly, crud. I feel like the ugliest duckling at a lovely party, plodding through the city.

Now we're talking. This Hummer is vastly improved with spoilers, a nice paint job and some bubbly vinyl on the flanks. Yummy.



Spray-paint doesn't have taste warnings. You'll wade through a few design disasters before settling on a favoured appearance.



The extent to which you can mod your car is astonishing. Nitrous purge, hydraulics and neon are among the new additions.

ON THE DISC Take our exclusive demo for an illegal spin through Bayview city > Demos

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are living in the future. In this strange place, games are released on time. Their worlds are freeform, yet so cunningly created as to ease you gently into a wondrous experience of exploration and discovery. Presentation is slicker than Norman Gunston's comb-over. Lights bloom, neon glows and digital music beeps and whirrs. From billboards, real-world advertising glares, and even a game's interface can be bought.

One of *NFSU2*'s atmospheric additions is a mobile phone (hands-free, I hope) in your car which receives text messages and calls directing you to new races, unlocked items and other locations around the game's freeform city of Bayview. But it's no generic device, instead being heavily branded with Cingular, a large US network operator (which doesn't seem to have waded across the Pacific yet) and its logo is almost always on your screen. Advertising in games is not a new phenomenon, but this, coupled with the ubiquitous billboard and shop-front branding, is a new high (or low) for the practice. It's nice to know that, in these uncertain financial times for the games business, there are other sources of income, but I'm not sure this is the future we all envisaged ten years ago.

It's *just* conceivable to consider all this as an advancement in realism, if you squint, but *NFSU2* raises the realism bar in a multitude of other more pleasing ways. The original's roster of races all took place in one city, with courses blocked off and set up for each race, but you were never able to freely roam that city. Now you can, in the all-new metropolis of Bayview, pootling around town rather than a menu screen between races. The mini-map indicates locations which trigger individual races, and there's always a good choice. The result is that the setting feels more important: you pay attention to the racing-scene folk who pop up occasionally, and become more involved in the notion of actually 'being' a street racer. Clever EA.

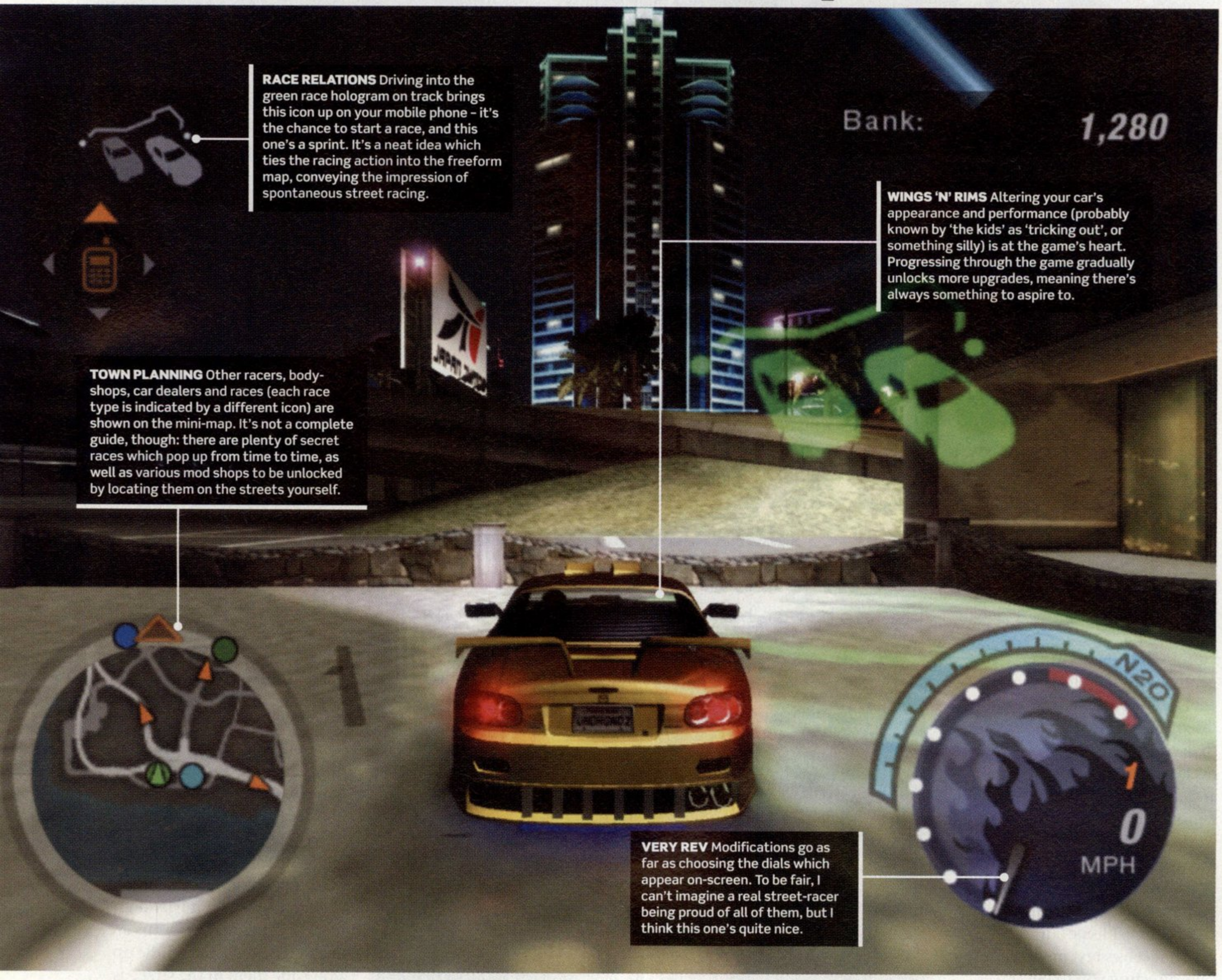
Lights bloom, neon glows and music beeps

Being a street racer means accepting sponsorship contracts from tuner-component companies for whom you'll need to win races. It's all good, because you'll need to win anyway to keep unlocking new cars, performance upgrades, visual accoutrements and tracks. Your sponsor might demand that you win a certain number of, say, Circuit races, but you're essentially free to race however you want. The city's other roaming racers are another factor – shown on your mini-map as friendly orange icons. In fact, they're anything but friendly: these sociopathic car-crims are just itching for a race. Sidle up alongside them in the street as they hare along and you'll get the chance to challenge them to a Fast-and-the-Furious-style race. Pull ahead by a certain distance and you'll win the princely sum of $100; fall behind by a distance and you lose the same sum. Peanuts, you'd think, and you'd be right; there's very little in-game consequence to these races – just the smug knowledge that you've beaten some fool with a pink spoiler. Now *that's* emergent.

NFSU2 is more of a role-playing game than ever. Win races to unlock access to paint jobs and kit for your car in the time-honoured fashion, but the sheer number and diversity of items on offer is boggling. Apparently, spinners aren't the little old ladies I employ in my cotton mills on a paltry wage, but metallic ▶

TAKEN APART

"More neon than Times Square"



RACE RELATIONS Driving into the green race hologram on track brings this icon up on your mobile phone – it's the chance to start a race, and this one's a sprint. It's a neat idea which ties the racing action into the freeform map, conveying the impression of spontaneous street racing.

WINGS 'N' RIMS Altering your car's appearance and performance (probably known by 'the kids' as 'tricking out', or something silly) is at the game's heart. Progressing through the game gradually unlocks more upgrades, meaning there's always something to aspire to.

TOWN PLANNING Other racers, body-shops, car dealers and races (each race type is indicated by a different icon) are shown on the mini-map. It's not a complete guide, though: there are plenty of secret races which pop up from time to time, as well as various mod shops to be unlocked by locating them on the streets yourself.

VERY REV Modifications go as far as choosing the dials which appear on-screen. To be fair, I can't imagine a real street-racer being proud of all of them, but I think this one's quite nice.

devices attached to wheels which literally spin around, supposedly looking 'cool'. Downright dangerous, if you ask me. How about something much more sensible, like neon lighting for your boot (or 'trunk', if you insist)? The range of choices seems pointless to me, but doubtless somewhere there'll be someone who'll truly agonise over the size and brand of hi-fi amp they install at great expense.

All of this fussing and preening improves your car's visual rating, which again unlocks more options, but of course the real point is to create a totally unique car. That's particularly important when going online, and something quite easy to do with the theoretical billions of permutations on offer.

Fundamentally, it's a case of personalising your in-game persona with items that prove how far you've progressed in the game: a highly satisfying system of challenge and reward.

However, *NFSU2* muddies the water somewhat by offering a variety of rewards. Winning a standard race nets the stipulated cash reward, but there's also a reputation bonus to be fought for. Beat the other drivers by a significant margin and reputation points are gained; more for particularly crushing wins. It's not made abundantly clear what these various points are for, but it never feels like you're being made to jump through hoops; in fact, the game benefits from a slightly fuzzy objective. Win races! Have fun! It's a philosophy that's conducive to enjoying the experience, rather than worrying about specific goals all the time.

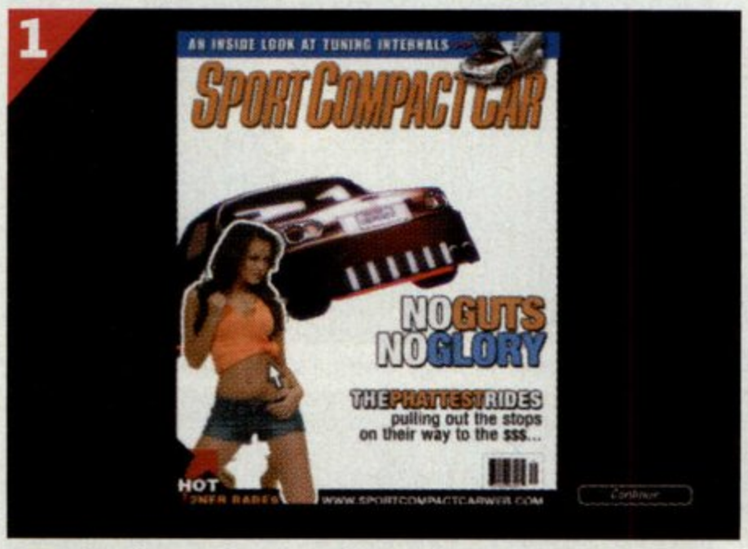
> Downright dangerous, if you ask me

Naturally, the way the cars handle is absolutely key to the driving experience. Happily, each is different and none are without their fun moments, even the lumbering SUV-type vehicles which you'll unlock early in the game. At the outset, the shop-standard motors are weak and struggle to attain 100mph. Whack in an engine upgrade to your Focus or MX-5 (the only sensible choice) and suddenly more power is at your fingertips; most upgrades have an appreciable effect. But what's this? More power with no handling or tyre upgrades turns your runabout into a snorting, slippery beast, prone to unprompted donutting.

While the handling and behaviour of all the cars could only be described as 'arcade', don't equate that with 'easy'. Notwithstanding the difficulty settings, you will encounter some bastard-hard races, particularly towards the end of the career game, where mistakes as minor as taking the wrong racing line on one corner will be punished by the AI drivers. To this end, an analogue controller – for acceleration as well as steering if possible – is a must to fully enjoy this game, let alone to beat it. It's clearly been designed around the

Moment of victory

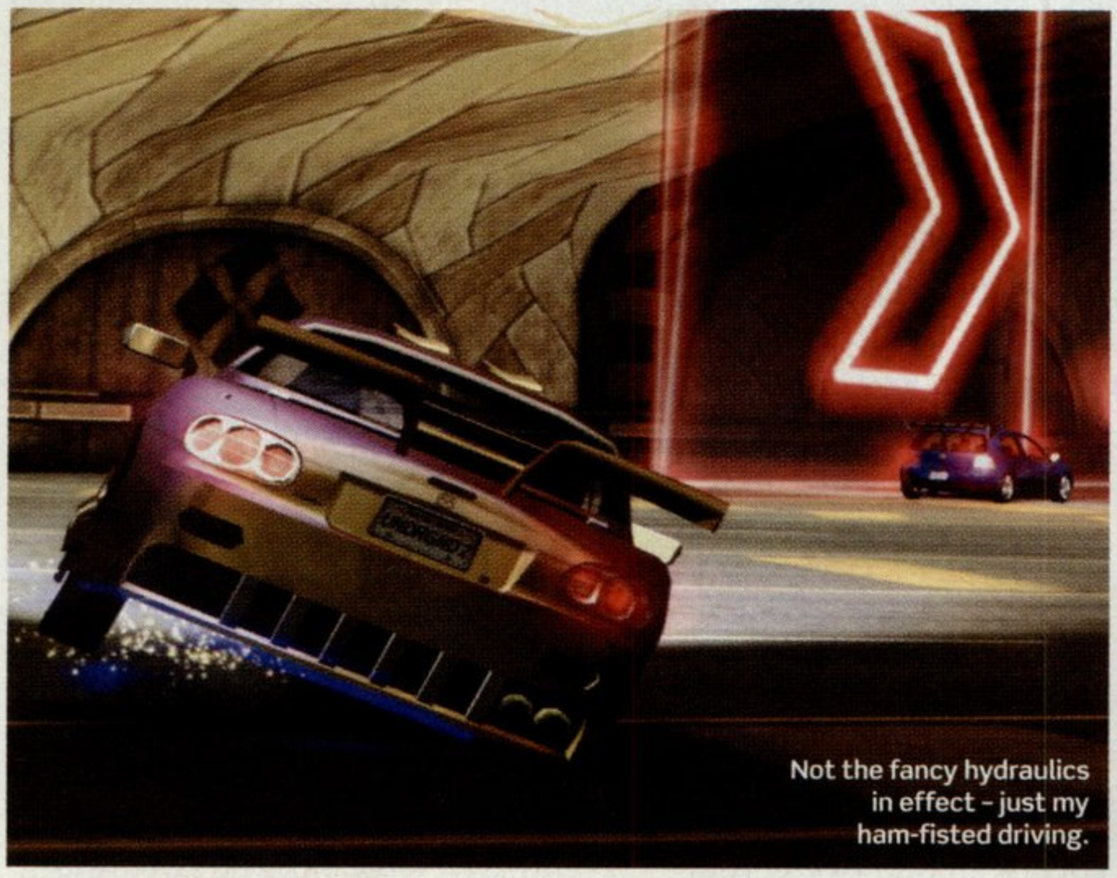
One of *NFSU2*'s master-strokes is to keep the rewards coming thick and fast



Occasionally you'll get a call to go to a location, where a photographer or DVD maker is conducting a shoot. Get there on time, and you can even direct the shoot.

The comic-book plot isn't central but, as with the original, gives a sense of progression and of there being other people on the 'scene'. Including Brooke Burke. Rrrowr.

Complete a few races and new areas of the city open up, along with new locations and races. The map keeps tabs on everything, and includes a handy GPS directional utility.



Not the fancy hydraulics in effect – just my ham-fisted driving.

Xbox's versatile controller… if only you could buy a device to make such a thing work on your PC, eh?

NFSU2 expands on the original's race types with a few new additions. Circuit and Sprint races are very much as they were, as is Drift – where points are scored for maintaining high-speed power-slides – except you'll have several other racers on the track with you instead of racing separately. Drag races – straight-line accelero-fests which test the timing of your gear-changes and your luck – are now longer and seem even faster, but the addition of several new race types are no less successful – see 'The fast and the occasionally grumpy'.

Time for a slight whinge. We have enough trouble in real life having to drive all around town for our various necessities: lobster at Watson's Bat, tailor on Military Rd, and so on. So why does *NFSU2* insist on only allowing repainting at one location? Admittedly, being able to jump to your home garage at any time to swap cars or parts is handy, but why can't your mechanic whip out the airbrush at the same time?

Perhaps he can't move for all the cars in there – for one of *NFSU2*'s best features is that you can own several cars at once. No longer are you restricted to having just the 'best' car – taking on lucrative contracts opens up new slots to own another vehicle, up to a maximum of five. Each must be separately upgraded, so you'll never be short of ways to spend your money, as you were in the original. With some 30-odd cars to choose from overall, and various types including giant SUVs (which have their own special races) you'll eventually have a car for every occasion.

This dovetails nicely with another new feature: being able to tune your car on a test track and rolling track; setting it up for optimum performance on different types of race. Now, this may be a bit much tweakery for some, but when you've really got hold of the game you can have different cars ready in your garage for different purposes: a flat-out racer for Sprints and Drags, one with monster acceleration and grip for Street-X, and so on.

My only major criticism of the original was that it limited multiplayer to EA's own restrictive online system. I'd love to think that they've been listening carefully to everything I say (not that I'm paranoid about being bugged, but, hey, this is EA we're talking about) but it's happened. I'm happy to say that *NFSU2* now boasts a full slate of LAN functions in addition to EA Online play. Being able to show off how much you've unlocked, and quite how little taste you have when it comes to colour schemes, is a delicious joy, regardless of who wins, though it can lead to mismatches if one racer simply has more under the bonnet.

It's slightly ironic that *NFSU2* is really aimed at the consoles, where the weight of competition from the likes of *Burnout 3* means it may not gain pre-eminence. On the PC, though, it's hard to find any competition at all for an arcade racer that hardly puts a tyre wrong.

ROSS ATHERTON

PC GAMES ADDICT Pumped-up racing with twin fun-turbo

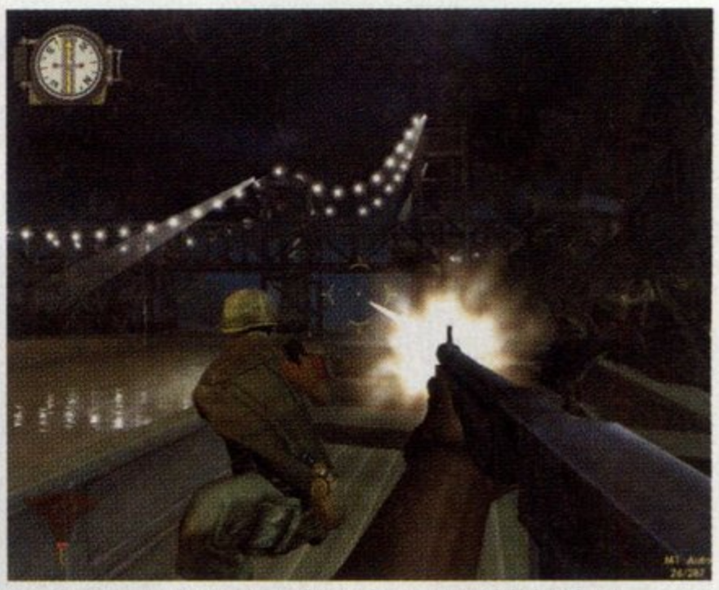
IT'S › Slick › Street-talking › Jammed with advertising

IT'S NOT › A simulation › Over-structured › Missing LAN play this time

Unspoiled

90%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ■ **Developer** In-house ■ **They say** 933Mhz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card
■ **Multiplayer** LAN, Internet, up to six ■ **Link** www.needforspeed.com ■ **Influenced by** Midnight Club 2, twockers ■ **Alternatively** Need For Speed Underground (on budget now)


Remind you of anything? Oooh, I can't think what...

MEN OF VALOR

Because there's no 'U' in the Marines?

Mostly it's the little things. Such as the fact that in *Call of Duty* all enemies drop their weapon when they die. Common sense. If you didn't swap out the weapon, you at least pilfered the ammo. *Men of Valour*, footnote to *Medal of Honour* and latest in a recent lineage of misjudged Vietnam games, does things differently. Why? Well, no reason. Seems like it's just being pig-headed.

Thumbnail Review

Visit the Heart of Darkness and quickly run out of patience

- ☑ Jungle
- ☑ Swearing
- ☑ Fireflies
- ☒ Ammo

Deep jungle and grotesque US foreign policy meet once again in this creative misfire.

For a while, though, everything seems fine. Mission briefings unravel 'Nam archetypes and in-game you follow the ubiquitous objective-compass to find the next foe. As the fight progresses through burned-out wastelands and trashed villages you search the bodies of the fallen for pickups. This isn't particularly interesting, but adds a new twist to the medkit and ammo clip hoovering. You even pick up some clunky Soviet weaponry here and there. But after a while you begin to sense that something is wrong. What could it be? It's this: you haven't got any ammo. Worse, your enemies aren't dropping any ammo, and their weapons have vanished in a puff of logic. Soon you have nothing. Should I assault that machinegun nest with no health and the butt of my rifle? Sure thing! Marines are made of stern stuff. But they are not, it seems, made of fun. *MoV* is a big game, which is commendable, but the multi-part levels cannot be saved and you have to play through a whole mission to open up the next. Be anything but miserly with your ammo and you're going nowhere.

Arriving with whiffs of dope paranoia

ON THE DISC Take a stroll down the Ho Chi Minh trail yourself with our *Valourous* demo > Demos

Yeah, this is a balancing issue. The designers need to sprinkle in a bit more ammo here and there, and make sure all your foes drop their beloved AKs. But frankly we don't need to buy broken games in the hope that someone has the decency to patch them into playability at a later date. It's simply not acceptable.

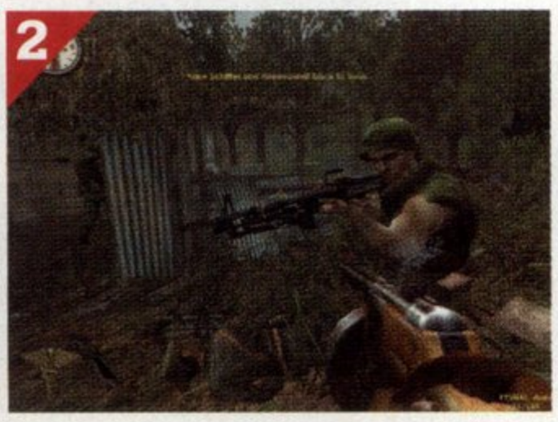
BIG CHOPPER

Tour of duty

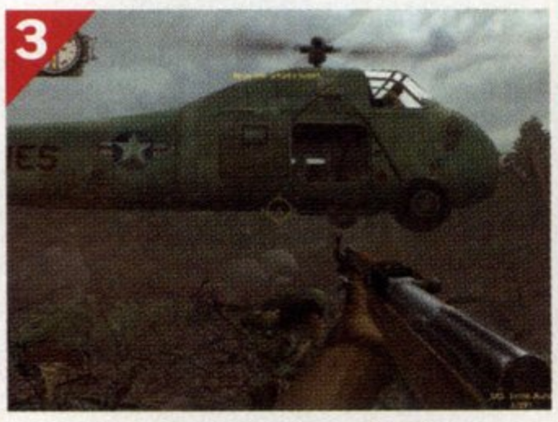
Jungle wars are nothing compared to jazz sieges

1

Out of the APC and WHAM! BOOM! SHRAK! The 'Cong know you're here and they're not best pleased.


2

Meet up with the rest of the guys at the Hamlet and begin the clearance. Brutal stuff, but necessary. Hopefully.

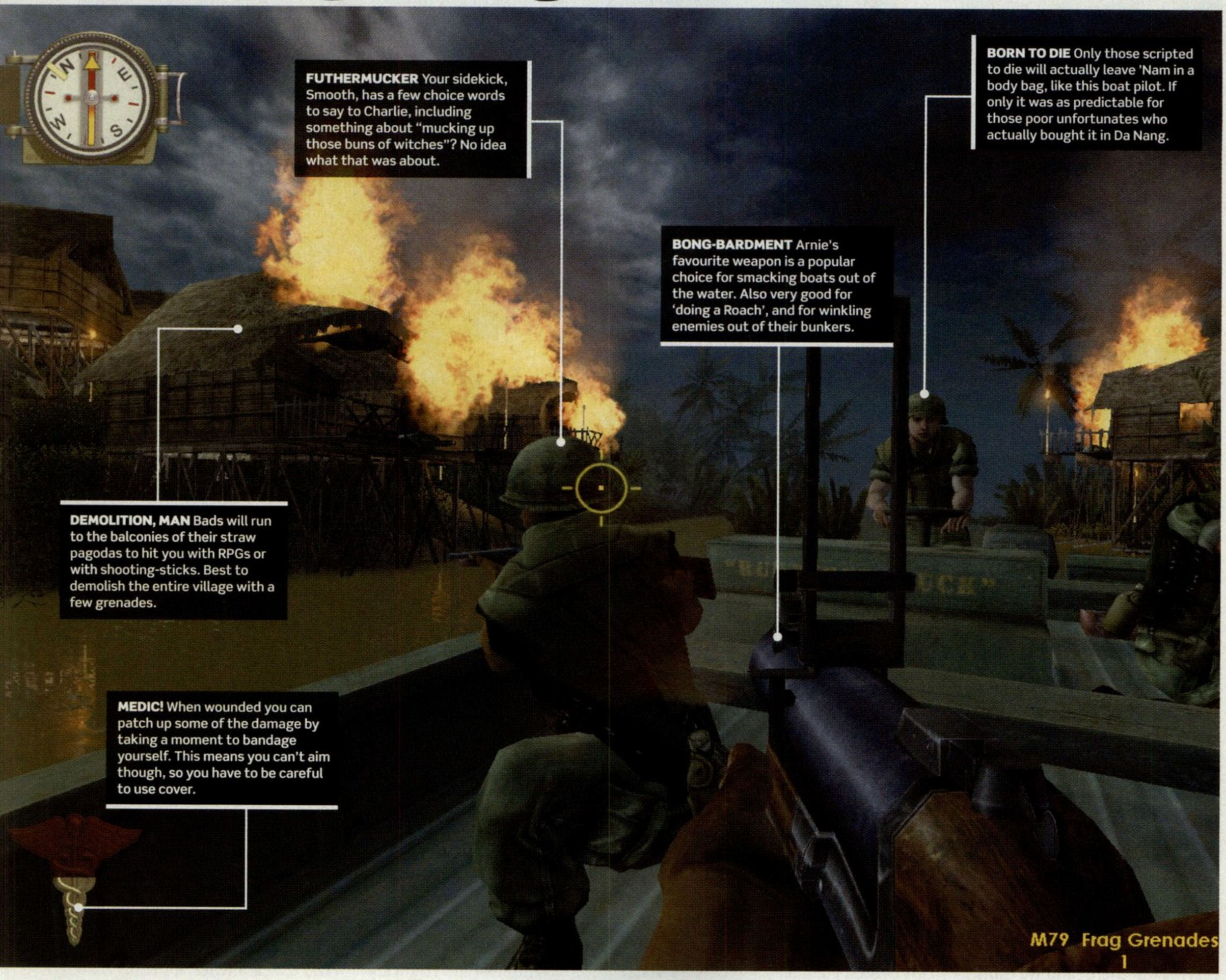

3

Extraction means getting to the chopper without getting your legs removed. Man that gun!

4

Sarge is still on the ground so the chopper circles and you lay down fire while you wait for him to sort his life out.

Storming a bridge over troubled water


FUTHERMUCKER Your sidekick, Smooth, has a few choice words to say to Charlie, including something about "mucking up those buns of witches"? No idea what that was about.
BORN TO DIE Only those scripted to die will actually leave 'Nam in a body bag, like this boat pilot. If only it was as predictable for those poor unfortunates who actually bought it in Da Nang.
BONG-BARDMENT Arnie's favourite weapon is a popular choice for smacking boats out of the water. Also very good for 'doing a Roach', and for winkling enemies out of their bunkers.
DEMOLITION, MAN Bads will run to the balconies of their straw pagodas to hit you with RPGs or with shooting-sticks. Best to demolish the entire village with a few grenades.
MEDIC! When wounded you can patch up some of the damage by taking a moment to bandage yourself. This means you can't aim though, so you have to be careful to use cover.
M79 Frag Grenades
1

There is still much to enjoy, though. Indeed, if *MoV had* been finished you would have enjoyed an occasionally well-scripted shooter that conveys some of the ludicrous, violent, unpredictable battle horror that endowed the Vietnam war with its unique brand of ugly intensity. Screaming Vietcong stream from the jungle, mortars whirr and smack into the rice paddies with a concussive impact akin to a kick in the brain. The cutscenes work if you squint a bit, and if you can choke down the fact that the whole world is clearly waiting for you to trigger it into action, then there's a pretty broad range of squad-based situations to overcome. While it's less imaginative than *Pacific Assault*, the combat is generally more entertaining, and the 'Nam game world isn't showing any signs of WWII fatigue just yet.

The chatter between your soldiers is uncharacteristically coarse and amusing. The opening micro-drama of escorting a war-reporter and cameraman through trap-filled villages in the Vietnamese scrub sets the tone for the whole game; insults are traded and friends are blown into meat chunks the size of your fist. The jungle village fights are spiced with the kind of close-quarters brutality that made *Call of Duty* so compelling. Some of the setpieces are strong too, including the river sequences which arrive with whiffs of dope paranoia and a long sideways glance at Apocalypse Now. This whole section is grim and evocative, but it quickly descends into a broken quagmire of irritation, infuriating the persistent player with its illogical ammo balancing and vacant AI.

It's clear there is space for a genuinely genre-breaking Vietnam game, something that will shock and engross like other great shooters, something that will capture the rock 'n' roll and drugs 'n' butchery that made Vietnam the defining conflict of the Cold War. But this isn't it. You know, I love the smell of napalm in the morning, but I hate the smell of rushed releases, clumsy game design and the kind of absurd mismanagement that results in lost opportunities like this. Smells like... defeat.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

PC GAMES ADDICT **Blasts of fun marred by attrition**

IT'S › Green › Tripwire › Shrapnel

IT'S NOT › Dope › Slick › Smooth

Ambushed

78%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** VU Games ■ **Developer** 2015 ■ **They say** 1.3GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, DirectX 9 compatible 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** LAN, Online ■ **Link** www.2015.com ■ **Influenced by** Medal of Honour: Allied Assault ■ **Alternatively** Call of Duty

"Jeez Bill, can't you hold it until the services?"

Ah, another sunset, another capped ass. Or Sarge as he's known.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 SABRE SQUADRON

Revealing the British Army's secret weapon... Pirates!

Gamers, we're really annoyed at you. We told you to buy *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, and what did you do? You went and bought anything but. Looking online, there are approximately three of you playing out there (and we think that you're probably the developers). Unless you're hiding (and hence, quite dangerous) we're very disappointed.

Well, *Sabre Squadron* should rectify your lassitude. The big point of this add-on pack is to get everyone to play together; more exactly, to play the big new shiny co-operative mode. Excited yet? Mmm, well, buck up quick.

For anyone who missed the briefing on *H&D2*, it's a highly tactical, infuriatingly tough Special Forces effort that can be played as a strategy game, a FPS, an action-adventure with an RPG accent, a vehicle sim, and sports a pretty ripping multiplayer on top of that. In addition it looks pretty spiffing, too.

None of this is lost with the expansion pack, except maybe the handlebar moustaches look slightly lusher and the million irritating bugs have been exterminated.

The co-op mode is the biggest change, and it should neatly regenerate *H&D*'s appeal. It plays practically identically to the normal multiplayer, except that you're not fighting each other, you're fighting AI enemies over singleplayer maps. It has that *Sven Co-op* feel about it, but what's lacking is a campaign mode with player advance; your eventual victory over the computer player feels oddly empty without briefings, debriefings and medals.

The handlebar 'tashes are slightly lusher

On top of the co-op missions there are the usual selection of expansion pack extras: a few extra levels set in France, Libya, Sicily and Burgundy which have been replicated as multiplayer maps (and look oddly like levels from the first game – we are almost convinced that we've visited the canyon driving sequence before).

Then there are a couple of new vehicles to drive; the Willys Jeep and the M4 Sherman tank; they both handle well enough, but are really cosmetic additions to single campaigns of singleplayer mode.

The enemies have certainly been improved upon as well; on hard mode it's virtually impossible to handle them, and we're sure that they were laying down covering fire for each other. And all the AI glitches from the first round have been ironed out, giving the game a much more professional feel.

But while *Sabre Squadron* is likeable and a timely reminder of *H&D2*'s excellence, it's really a case of 'good value' rather than a truly inventive expansion. The handful of maps, vehicles and guns thrown in with a new mode that should have been in the full game, does not make *SS* a storm-trooper. It can brandish its shiny World War 2 blade at the horde of shoddy shooters emerging from the skanky Ho Chi Minh trail, but *Sabre Squadron*'s D.S.M is definitely not in the post.

DAN GRILIOPOULOS

PC GAMES ADDICT: Not bad but doesn't aim high enough

IT'S
- Fixed most bugs
- Expensive
- Perfect for quick co-op

IT'S NOT
- Enough
- A complete overhaul
- The end of the war

Rattle

78%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Take 2 ■ **Developer** Illusion Softworks ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 2.4Gb HD, 32 Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card
■ **Multiplayer** LAN, Internet, Co-op, Deathmatch, Occupation ■ **Link** www.hidden-and-dangerous.com/hd2 ■ **Influenced by** H&D, H&D2, MoH ■ **Alternatively** Battlefield 1942

MORTYR II

We shall never surrender! Oh, I give up

Farmer/hiker hostilities reach new level.

Halt! Hammer time.

World War II – now that was a sequel. More weapons, better graphics (some of it was in colour) and more missions. And rocket launchers! You can't argue with that. But for *Mortyr II* to be significantly better than its predecessor, the original would need to be *Pacman* with swastikas. Which it wasn't... [hurried shuffling of papers]. No. No it wasn't.

Yet *Mortyr II* isn't quite the coruscating human tragedy WWII was either so, hey, smile. Its heart's in the right place and it's clear the makers cared; it's not just another weary war horse / cash cow (war cow?) exploiting the current popularity of Nazis. Oh no. The trouble is, it's still pretty substandard anyway. At times it's even quite bad, but it's difficult to really resent it. It's like watching a chess club try to throw a ball – you know they're doing their best.

Take the AI-controlled soldiers. It's as if you're fighting a battalion of elite opticians, so good is their eyesight, but this doesn't quite reinforce the need for stealth the way it should. Their 'headless chicken' fighting tactics make sniping boringly long-winded, and you soon find it's easier just to clump in close and blast them to pieces.

Most victims drop health packs and ammo anyway, although the satisfied sighs you make as you 'heal' are actually quite upsetting – in a fierce battle *Mortyr* sounds like some kind of roving pervert. Couple this with the way everyone dies so very slooooooowwly in localised pockets of lunar gravity – arms and legs wibbling like the inflated fingers of a rubber glove – and WWII can get quite weird.

Bravely ignoring the existence of knees

What we shall officially designate 'voice achtung' (bad voice acting with accents) doesn't help the generally patchy sound either, and character animations that bravely ignore the existence of knees are breaking the wrong kind of barriers.

Worse, even a sexy 2.2GHz, 1Gb RAM, Radeon 9800XT skyscraper of a PC was brought to its knees by *Mortyr II*'s higher settings. This despite it running *Far Cry* like a puddle runs reflections. Expect to trade OK-ish panoramas for noticeable pop ups. Grenade!

Yet none of what *Mortyr II* offers is totally disastrous. Some sections – such as a trip through a frontline trench – are even quite spectacular-ish if you're happy blasting stupid, skipping enemies on a very narrow path. Aptly enough, the developers, Mirage, sometimes make very little action go quite a long way, but they only needed to because their game had such a deeply ungainly engine in the first place.

The result is a game that is reasonable within its limitations, but you'll only be trapped there if you choose this over *Call of Duty* or *Medal of Honour*. So don't.

STEVE WILLIAMS

PC GAMES ADDICT: Needlessly low-budget Nazi-nullifying

IT'S › OK › Trying to please › Unsophisticated

IT'S NOT › Clever › Well-told › Very good

Fatigues

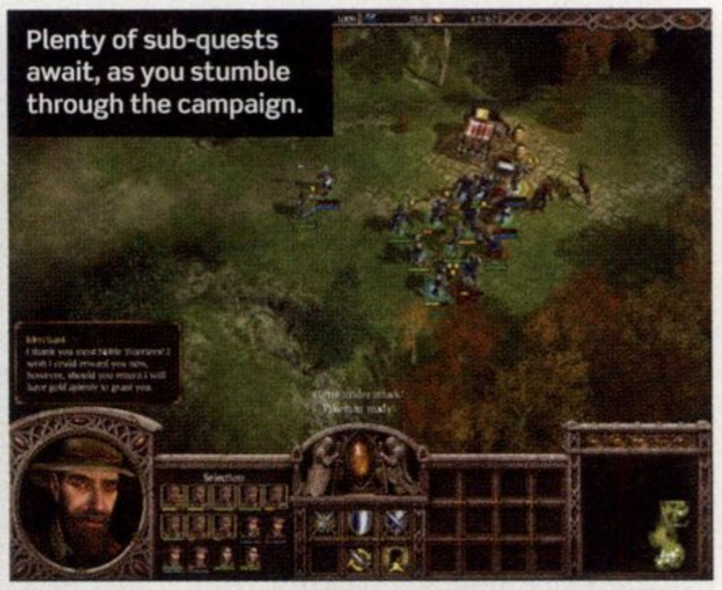
58%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Redback ■ **Developer** Mirage ■ **They say** 1.2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** LAN ■ **Link** www.mortyr2.net ■ **Influenced by** Medal of Honor, Where Eagles Dare ■ **Alternatively** Call of Duty, Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

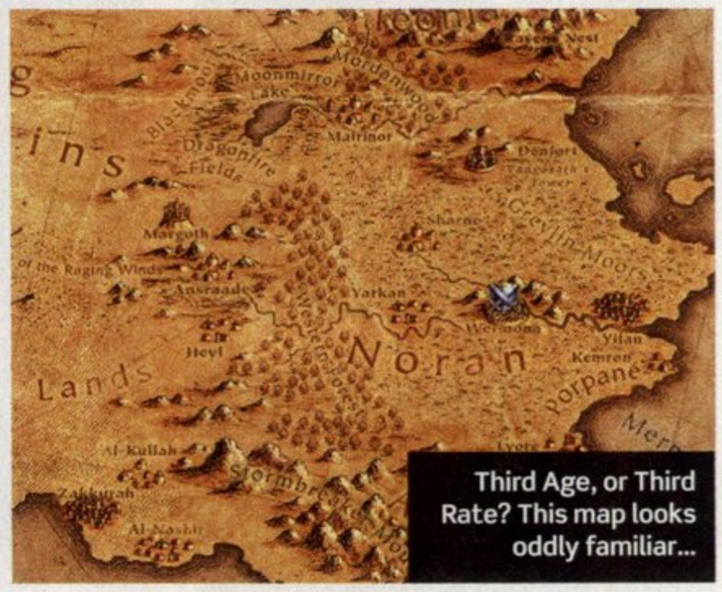
ARMIES OF EXIGO

Taking real time strategy to another level

Huge, undulating maps on multiple levels – is your head spinning yet?



Plenty of sub-quests await, as you stumble through the campaign.



Third Age, or Third Rate? This map looks oddly familiar...

Thumbnail Review

A dual-layer RTS that won't break your

- ☑ Elves
- ☑ Orcs
- ☑ Wizards
- ☒ Jub Jub

Looks good, but there's nothing new under the hood. For RTS addicts only.

Many RTS fans love nothing more than to amass absurdly vast armies and lay waste to similarly oversized enemy forces. It may not be efficient game design, but it's still a lot of fun, setting up and knocking down virtual tin soldiers like dominoes. Other than arbitrary unit caps, a big factor in limiting this roving bloodlust is often the space available on the map. Seeking to expand cybernetic slaughter into a whole new direction, Hungarian developer Black Hole has created an RTS with dual-layer level maps. A fully sized underworld map complements the surface layer, with the two linked by dungeon entrances and player-created portals. Together with a unit limit of 200, the stage is set for mayhem.

The similarities to *Warcraft III* are remarkable. Nay – overwhelming. From the top-down view of the map, to the break-down of generic fantasy units, to base-building and tech trees, to a hundred other incidental details. It's a carbon copy in all but name, and the differences are largely confined to its deficiencies. While there is a variety of voice samples for each unit, there's none of the comic progression we've come to expect from the off-kilter *Warcraft* universe. The gaps left by this lack of humour have been filled in with odds and ends from the *Lord of the Rings* movies, as if to cram in the maximum quota of plagiarism possible in one hit.

To be fair, *Armies of Exigo* has attempted to carve out its own niche in the RTS stakes, with a graphical look and feel that incorporates more of a sense of realism than we may be used to. The extreme close-ups of talking heads, for one, offer a parade of adverse medieval skin conditions. And that's just the humans – when goblins start taking their cut-scene orders one can barely focus on the deformities. Dialogue, too, strives for at least a comic book approximation of ancient speaking patterns, with two concessions: nobody sounds like Yoda, and everyone speaks in an accessible American drawl.

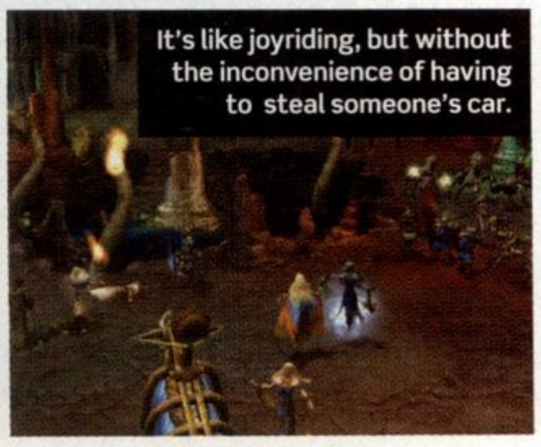
Not so much a bad effort as a hap-hazard one

Suspension of disbelief gets tugged on from both directions from the main view, too, as the elaborate 3D environments come into play. The more realistic the units look, the harder they are to tell apart, and thus manage in battle. Thankfully there are some sophisticated controls for organising troops into groups, so their battle orders can be punched in even after they've become a flurry of pixels at one with the enemy. But for an example of unchecked graphical realism, one need merely examine the plentiful source of one of the games three key resources (along with gold and gems) – the trees.

Trees sway with the wind, their intricately modeled fronds gently wafting back and forth. It's eye-catching at first, but like the shifting deck of pleasure craft, this well-meaning novelty can soon lead to motion sickness. Combine this with an inexplicable tendency for the overhead perspective to sway and shudder when approaching the edge of the map, and you have a recipe for distraction. Thankfully, the engine does more graphical good than harm, with lovely little incidental effects like rain and shafts of sunshine also contributing to the game experience. Thus the look and feel comes off not so much as a bad effort, as a hap-hazard one; an impression that extends to every corner of the game.

Level design is middling, and occasionally weak. The tricks of misdirection, changing objectives and convoluted paths have only partly been implemented. The

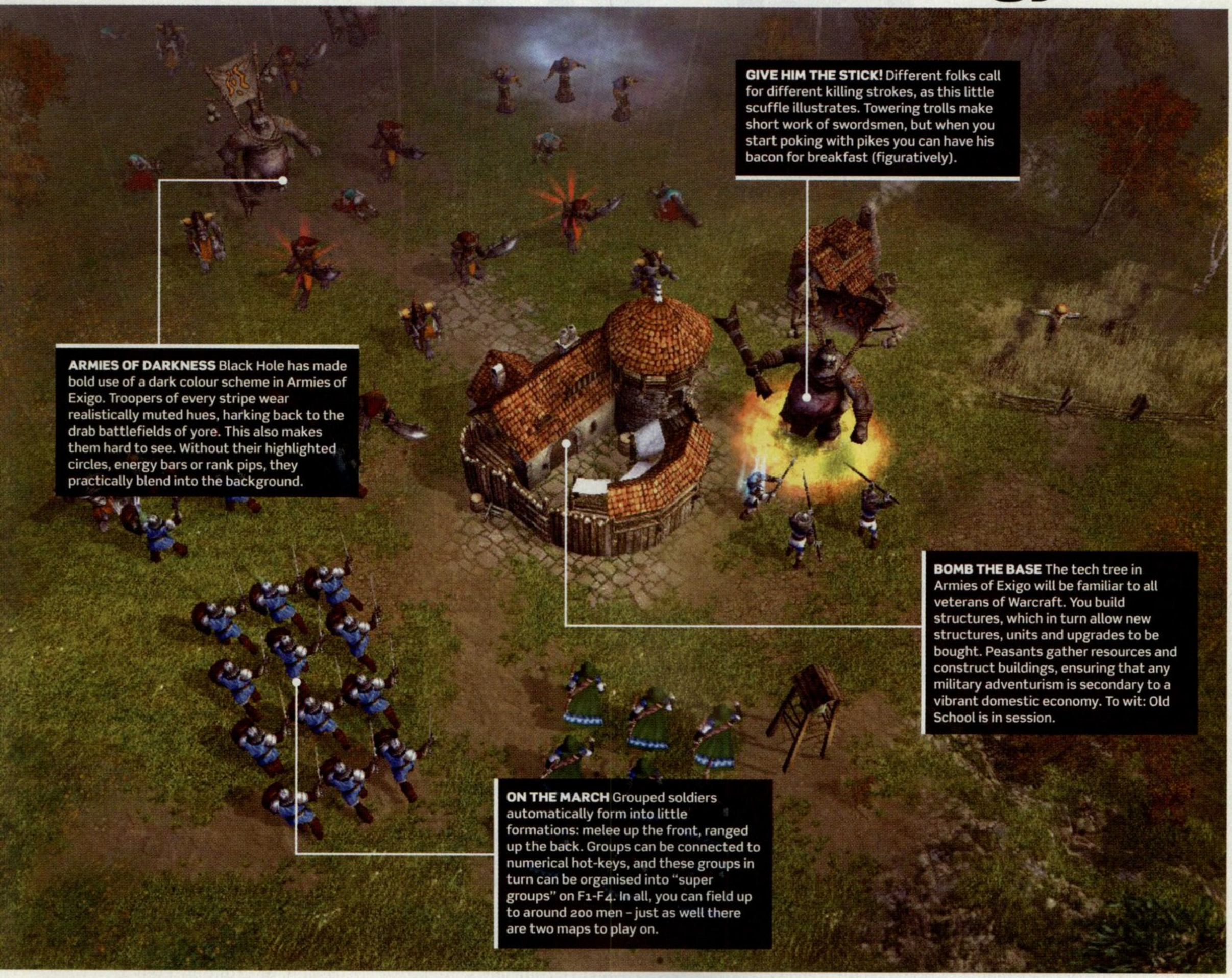
Snakes Alive! Inter-dimensional nasties await you underground.



It's like joyriding, but without the inconvenience of having to steal someone's car.

TAKEN APART

Goblin your fair share of strategy



GIVE HIM THE STICK! Different folks call for different killing strokes, as this little scuffle illustrates. Towering trolls make short work of swordsmen, but when you start poking with pikes you can have his bacon for breakfast (figuratively).

ARMIES OF DARKNESS Black Hole has made bold use of a dark colour scheme in Armies of Exigo. Troopers of every stripe wear realistically muted hues, harking back to the drab battlefields of yore. This also makes them hard to see. Without their highlighted circles, energy bars or rank pips, they practically blend into the background.

BOMB THE BASE The tech tree in Armies of Exigo will be familiar to all veterans of Warcraft. You build structures, which in turn allow new structures, units and upgrades to be bought. Peasants gather resources and construct buildings, ensuring that any military adventurism is secondary to a vibrant domestic economy. To wit: Old School is in session.

ON THE MARCH Grouped soldiers automatically form into little formations: melee up the front, ranged up the back. Groups can be connected to numerical hot-keys, and these groups in turn can be organised into "super groups" on F1-F4. In all, you can field up to around 200 men – just as well there are two maps to play on.

result feels more like the fevered first creations of an amateur dungeon master than a living, breathing world. *AoE's* big draw-card, the dual layer map, offers variety, if not substance, with an angular underworld offering a contrast to the organic surface. The focused underground mission has for years been a handy foil to alternate with free-roaming RTS antics. Combining the two seems logical, but while it's certainly a change of pace, the problems of the surface world still extend to killing rats in the dark.

Like everything else, the story is cobbled together from recognisable fantasy elements, but doesn't quite gel as a whole. The cut scenes won't impress anyone who's seen a cut scene before, and the characterisations are stiff as boards. It's here that the lack of finesse is most telling. Each challenge is structured to be engaging, somewhat different to the last, and part of a wider struggle to defeat the forces of evil. Yet the compulsion to compete and complete each goal extends no further than raw numbers: getting the gold and lumber to train the peasants to build the farms to feed the army that'll sack the orc encampment in a flurried anti-climax. Difficulty largely stems from attempting to guess unit utility and strength, and in managing the sprawling armies the game engine has generously allowed players to assemble.

The dual layer map offers variety

Who will *Armies of Exigo* appeal to? The answer, surprisingly, is those who will pick up on its flaws the most: hardcore RTS fans. Those who've played through *The Frozen Throne* until they're blue in the face will relish the chance to dominate a whole new world, with the added relief of not having to learn any pesky new game concepts. Novelty and accessibility will drive its sales, together with slick (if misguided) production values. It won't take over your life, but it might just get under your skin – and sometimes that's enough.

JAMES COTTEE

PC GAMES ADDICT Overground... Underground...

IT'S ›Unoriginal ›Another epic RTS ›Uncannily like Warcraft III

IT'S NOT ›Nearly as good as Warcraft III ›Genre-Busting ›That bad

Wombling

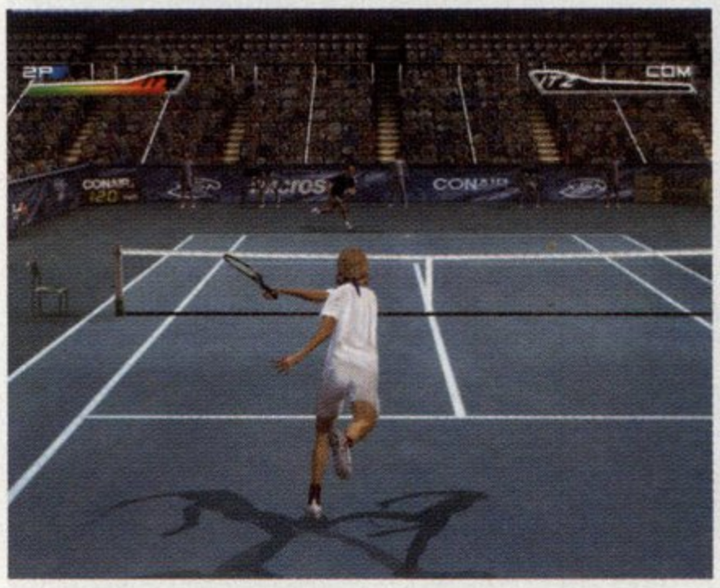
78%

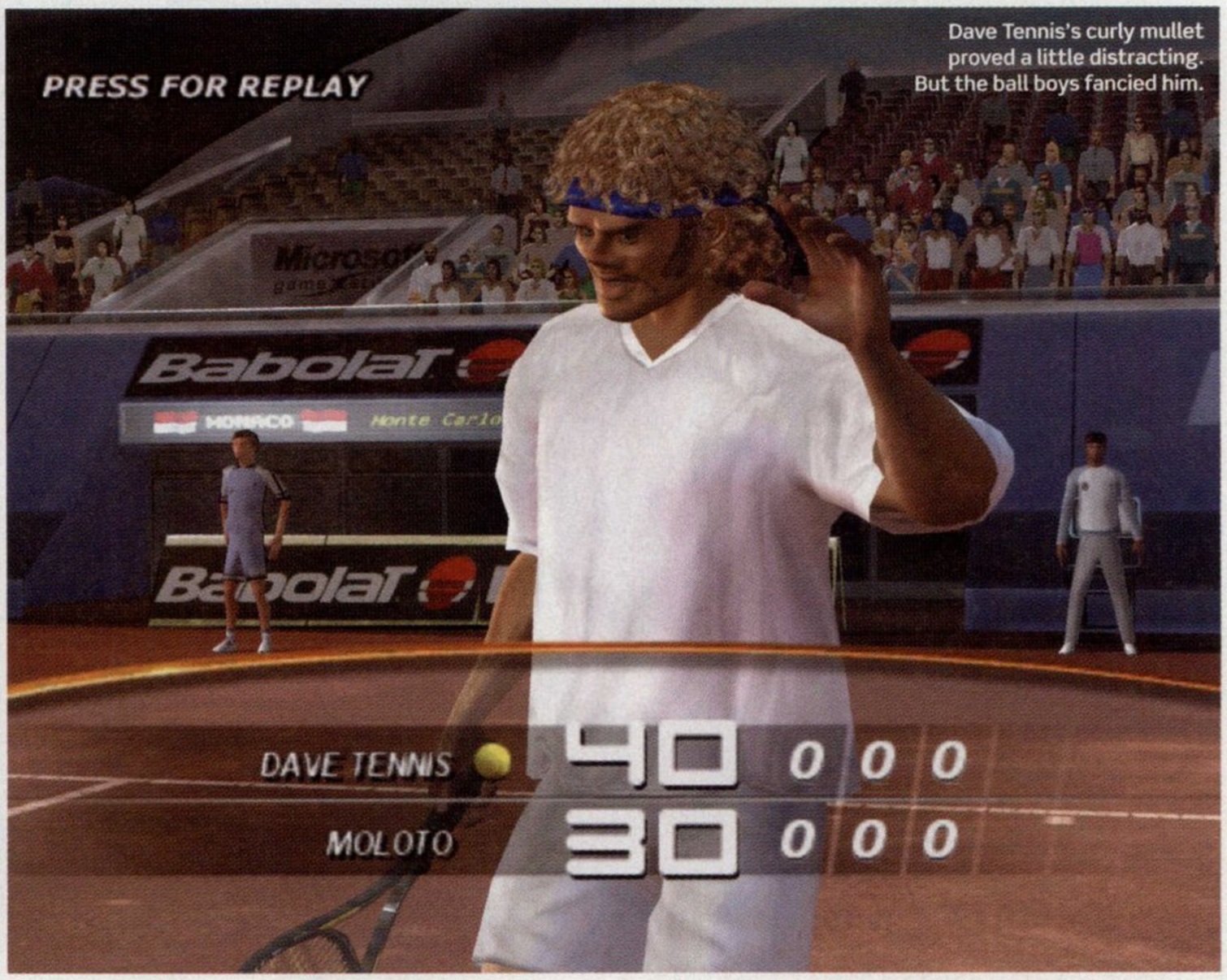
■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** EA ■ **Developer** Black Hole ■ **They Say** 1.5 GHz CPU, 384 MB RAM, 64Mb 3D Card ■ **We Say** 1.8 GHz CPU, 512 MB RAM, 128 Mb 3D Card ■ **Multiuplayer** Online, Up to 8 ■ **Link** www.eagames.com/official/armiesofexigo/armiesofexigo/us ■ **Community** www.eagames.com/official/armiesofexigo/armiesofexigo/us ■ **Influenced by** Warcraft III ■ **Alternatively** Warcraft III

TOP SPIN

Come on, Dave!

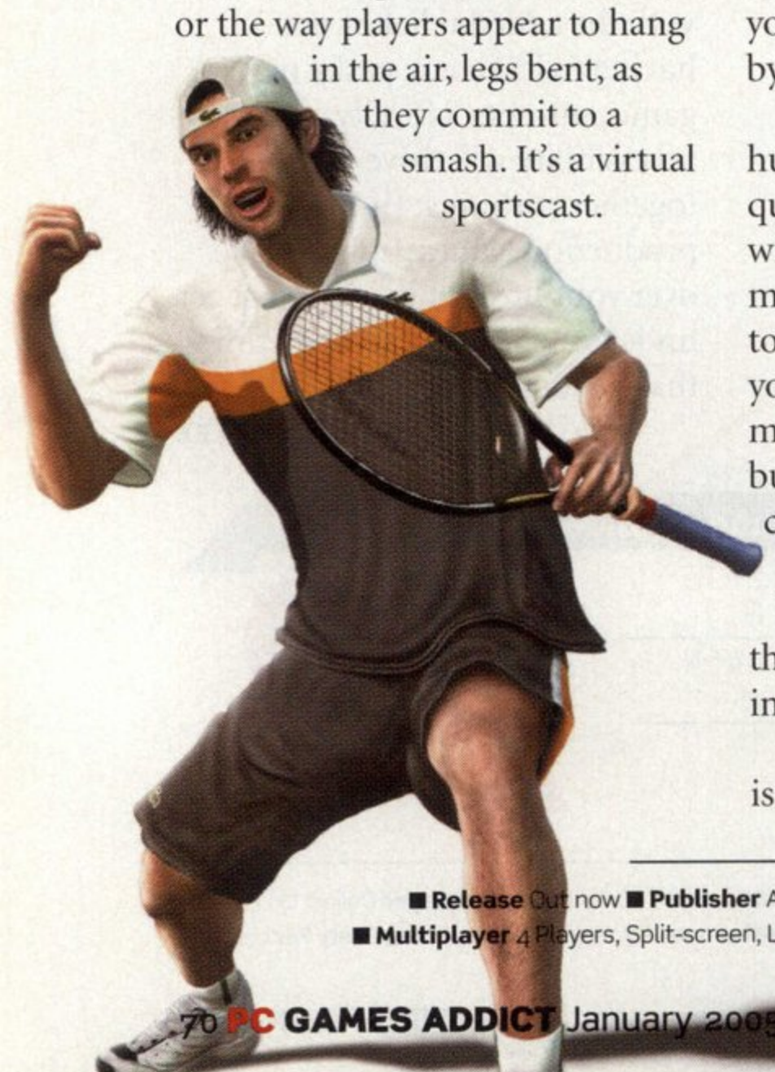
A rare mistake from Dave Tennis. It was a heroic effort.





Dave Tennis's curly mullet proved a little distracting. But the ball boys fancied him.

This *should* be one of the finest sports games, and the best tennis game, in one. It has superb animation, coupled with a simple-to-learn control system that allows skilled players to make tactical decisions about where to place the ball, when to place it, and with how much power. It looks gorgeous, as close as conceivable to a live television game. And it's full of incidental detail, such as the way the ball clips the white line on a clay court and throws up a little dust cloud, or the way players appear to hang in the air, legs bent, as they commit to a smash. It's a virtual sportscast.



Play revolves around the idea of being 'In the Zone'. Along with the standard top-spin, slice, safe and lob buttons assigned to the four face buttons on your joypad, you're given access to two special moves – a drop shot and a powerful smash. To get these in, you need to line up a dial as it oscillates up and down, by holding down on the triggers: get it right and you'll smack the ball into the far corners; miss, and you'll be caught out by the net.

Nailing this simple skill is hugely important: with it, you can quietly demolish any opponent; without it, you'll be drawn into massively extended rallies, unable to deliver that final blow. When you begin a match, it's difficult to make these decisive passing shots, but as you gain momentum, the computer eases off, allowing you to pull it off most of the time.

While it's possible to do so on the keyboard, I recommend investing in a couple of joypads.

For single players, the real thrill is the extended career: take your own custom character on a world-wide jaunt, rising up the rankings, earning cash for new socks, shades, shirts and shorts, while learning new skills and upping your abilities through simple training regimes. Strange though it might sound, *Top Spin* is actually a tennis RPG – your rise through the worldwide rankings coincides with the development of your character. You're allowed to 'master' certain abilities like strong backhands, graceful lobs and smashes, but not all of them, thus creating your own unique style. And unique is the watchword – thanks to the character creation system, my own character, Dave Tennis, is blessed with extraordinary height and length. He's able to pull balls heading baseline-wards back into play right by the net, his clumsy, lolloping gait and hideous visage proving more than a match for the assembled professionals.

Top Spin is actually a tennis RPG

Top Spin is excellent, have no doubt about that. It's as close to the real thing as we can imagine. Yet it still leaves me feeling a tad empty. There's no atmosphere to even the biggest matches, no passion, no grunting. Even extended multiplayer bouts feel cold and clinical, too precise. Rallys can go on for too long, just batting the ball back and forth, like *Pong*, not Ping-Pong. This is the problem: we're used to a certain pomp and pizzazz in our sports games. *Top Spin* doesn't bother with any of that, it just gets on with providing a beautiful sports game. That's just about enough to satisfy.

TIM EDWARDS

PC GAMES ADDICT Professional, but lacking passion

IT'S › An RPG › Lacking pomp › A tennis simulation

IT'S NOT › A smash hit › Arcade action › Hugely atmospheric

Serviceable

75%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Atari ■ **Developer** PAM ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card, joypad
■ **Multiplayer** 4 Players, Split-screen, LAN, Internet ■ **Link** www.atari.com ■ **Community** www.operationsports.com ■ **Influenced by** Pong, RSI ■ **Alternatively** Virtua Tennis

World's most powerful handgun, indeed.

SHADOW OPS

Sympathising with the enemy

Here's a good one: a bald-headed villain, right, who also has a goatee, has stolen a nuclear weapon – oh, you've heard it? What about the one about the special forces expert on his trail who – no? OK, then. Well how about the first-person shooter that... all right, I'm stopping now. Suffice to say that *Shadow Ops* puts you into the grimy combat boots of a modern-day special forces expert with an important mission.

There is a little more on offer here than usual: the badguy AI, for example, which ensures enemies make use of obstacles to keep themselves covered. Advance on their position and they'll drop back; hide for too long and they'll move forward. This simple yet overdue innovation turns a distinctly bland game into – well, a slightly better one.

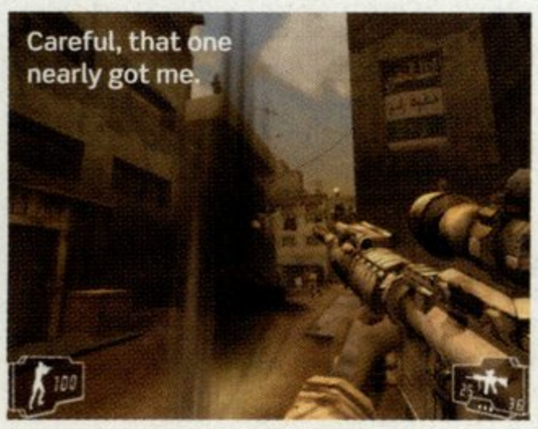
Rather than simply running around whatever location the level offers (ranging from genre staples like 'desert' and 'jungle' to the Eiffel tower), it's necessary to carefully sneak from cover to cover, peeking around corners and listening for enemy reloads. There are friendly soldiers to help out, although they're just drones who follow your lead.

While the levels are generic, there's a professional attention to detail that makes them very convincing. Weapons are *noisy* – their staccato bursts really give them a kick, while the soundtrack keeps the blood pumping and the brain on high alert.

How could *Shadow Ops* be less than spectacular?

With so much to recommend it, how could *Shadow Ops* be less than spectacular? Alas, it's an all too common failing – repetition. Once the need to hide behind the artfully positioned crates, pillars, sandbags, boulders, huts and team-mates is mastered, the excitement wanes and boredom rapidly takes its place. No matter how stunning the levels, no matter how professional a game is, constant repetition makes it about as much fun as strimming the lawn or stripping paint. And I play video games to get away from that sort of thing.

WILL JENKINS



Careful, that one nearly got me.

PC GAMES ADDICT

Like running a marathon. On a treadmill. With a gun.

64%

■ **Release** Out now **Publisher** Atari ■ **Developer** Zombie ■ **Multiplayer** Up to 32
■ **Link** www.atari.com/shadowops ■ **Alternatively** DF: Black Hawk Down

MYST IV: REVELATION

Epiphanies for all... but only if you've been there

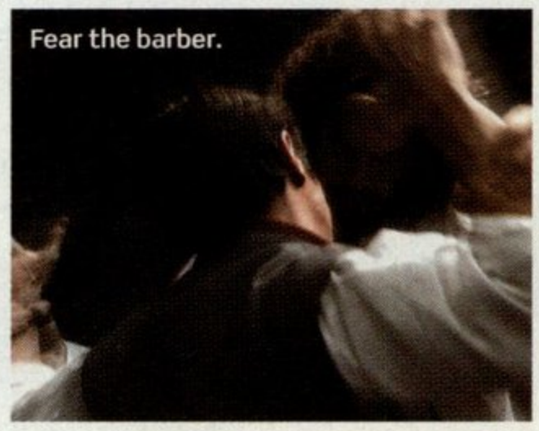
Before The Sims came and spoiled everything, the Myst series was the highest-selling PC game on the market. It combined lush visuals with intriguing puzzles that had to be put together so a compelling story fell into place. However, with more instantly gratifying games arriving, it was natural for headache-inducing point-n-click adventures to fall off the radar.

Unlike the previous foray into the world of Myst, *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*, *Revelation* offers a continuation of the story of Atrus and his villainous sons, Achenar and Sirrus. You play the role of an anonymous friend of Atrus, who is still fooling about with books which lead to other realms. You learn that he has imprisoned Achenar and Sirrus within two of these realms, and it isn't long before you're exploring them for yourself, in an attempt to piece together the tale.

Revelations is geared to serve the fans

The interface is fairly by-the-numbers for this genre. Although there is no 3D interaction with the environments, the visuals are sharp enough that it doesn't matter, with objects easy to find.

This is a good thing, because the puzzles are where the game is at, and they're quite testing. All are to be solved on location, using buttons, levers, knobs and other devices, but some require you to collect clues from other locations and ages. This is where the camera comes in handy – if you see something you think might be significant later, just photograph it so that you don't have to keep running back and forth, or jotting down notes with a pencil and paper.


Fear the barber.

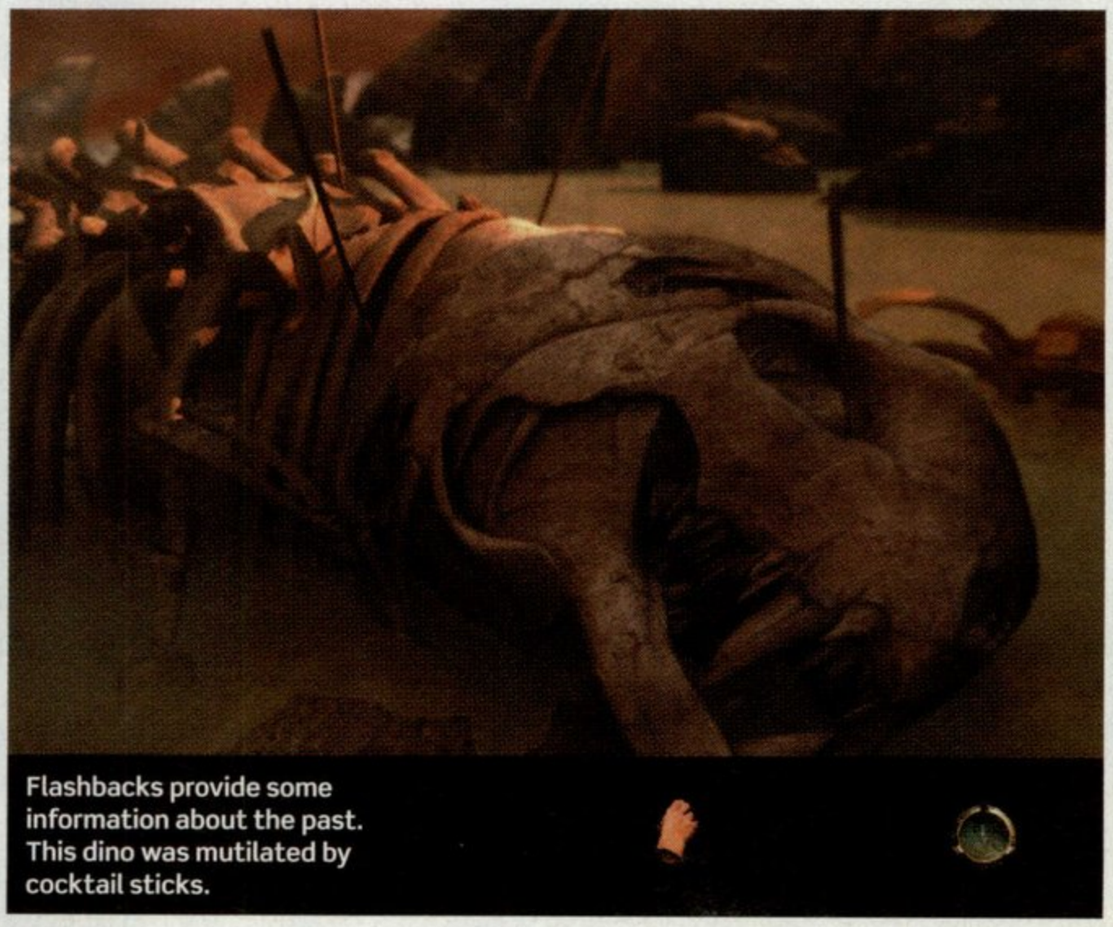
Though the formula may be tired, *Myst IV* is beautifully designed, challenging and an engrossing game. It offers little new since the days of *Myst III: Exile*, but *Revelations* is geared to serve the fans. For anyone else, it won't really make a whole lot of sense.

MICHELLE STARR

PC GAMES ADDICT

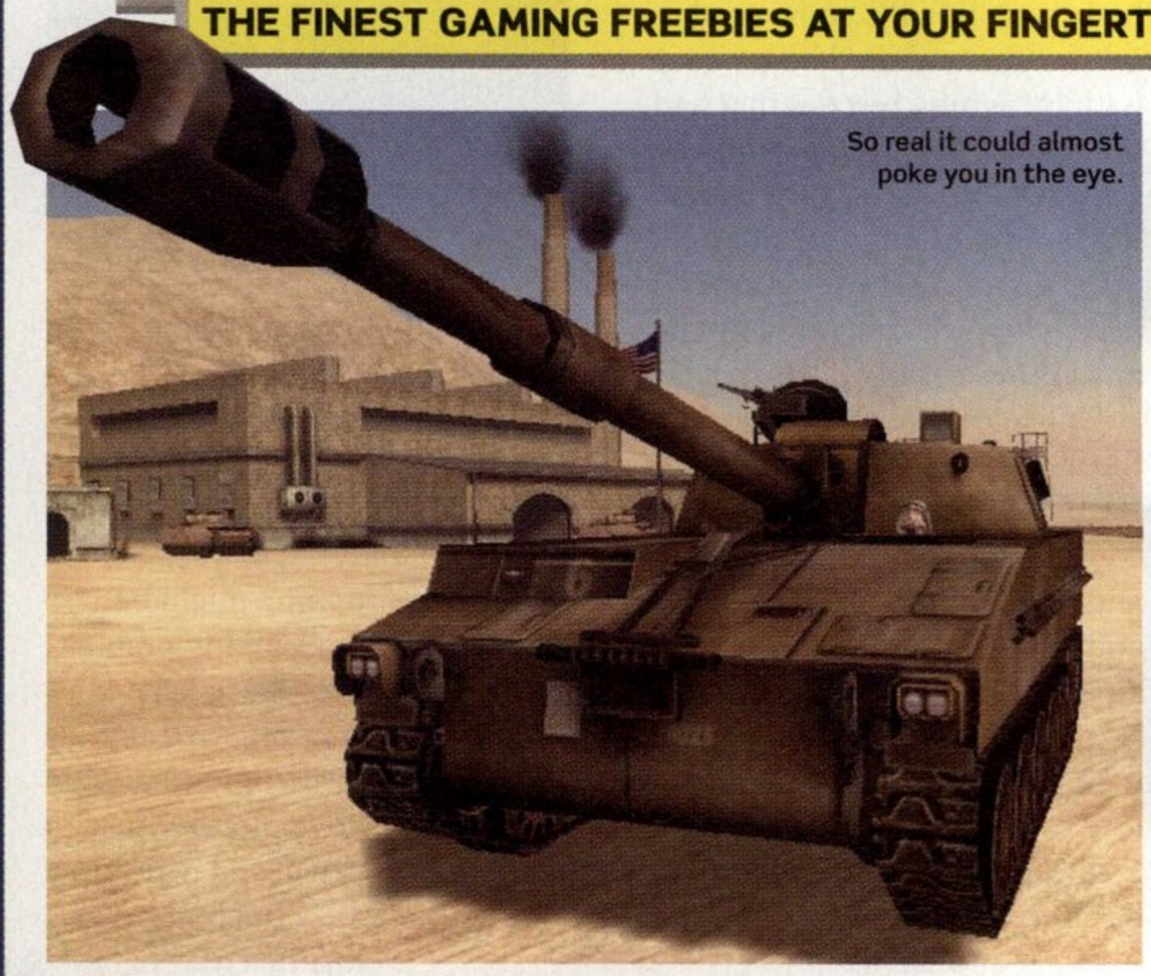
Gorgeous, but too challenging to be inviting to all be avid adventurers

78%


Flashbacks provide some information about the past. This dino was mutilated by cocktail sticks.

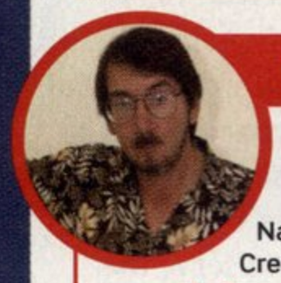
■ **Release** Out now **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Cyan Worlds, Inc.
■ **Multiplayer** No ■ **Link** www.mystrevelation.com ■ **Alternatively** Syberia

THE FINEST GAMING FREEBIES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



So real it could almost poke you in the eye.

What are pine trees doing in a desert, anyway?



CELEB

HI, I'M A GAME DEVELOPER

Name Will Wright
Credits *The Sims, SimCity, Sims 2*
My fave game: *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. When I play I feel like I can tell a lot of different stories in that game. I can go off and be an ambulance driver, and save lives if I want to, or cause mayhem.

My fave mod: For the last year I've been a big addict of *Battlefield: 1942*, so I play a lot of those mods.

The thing I'm most looking forward to: I really, really want to play *Rome*. I played *Shogun*, which I really liked, so I want this because it's by the same team, and I saw it at E3, and it looks really cool.

BF: 1942 MOD

Desert Combat Final

Storming in for one last time

Desert Combat, one of the mightiest multiplayer mods of recent times, is complete. Developers Trauma Studios have turned their attention to coding *Battlefield 2*, leaving us to run around in the dustbowl of jet planes, tanks and carnage left in their wake.

DOWN LOADER
The dust settles on *BF: 1942*'s modern-war mod

The quality of *Desert Combat*'s hellraising, Gulf War-inspired action is not in doubt. After all, it got the mod team a job with Electronic Arts. And this final version is, as you'd expect, Trauma's finest hour. The seven new maps steal the headlines. Of these, *First Light* is our early favourite, a vicious struggle over a vast sandy plain under a dim red sky. The Coalition are up against four Opposition bases, but sport an intimidating line of artillery and the awesome AC-130 transport, an incredible behemoth bomber and mobile spawn point. Then there is *Twin Rivers*, a flat grassland map: flags centred on an island split by meandering waters, reached only by the small temporary bridges or via the choppers on call at both factions' bases. A venue for violence if ever there was one.

The final edition also features the commanding, stealthy air presence of the F117 Nighthawk – a newly deployed weapon on the Operation Bragg map. It's another awesome piece of aerial hardware that's stubborn, but devastating once mastered.

For its creators, at least, this is the end. The future of *Desert Combat* is now in the hands of its army of fans. Something tells us that this war is far from over.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER — 361Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.desertcombat.com
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	*BF 1942*
Unadulterated multiplayer destruction	

LET US SPEND YOUR BANDWIDTH
Use the Download Manager to judge download speed, or find the best gaming picks of the month on the DVD.

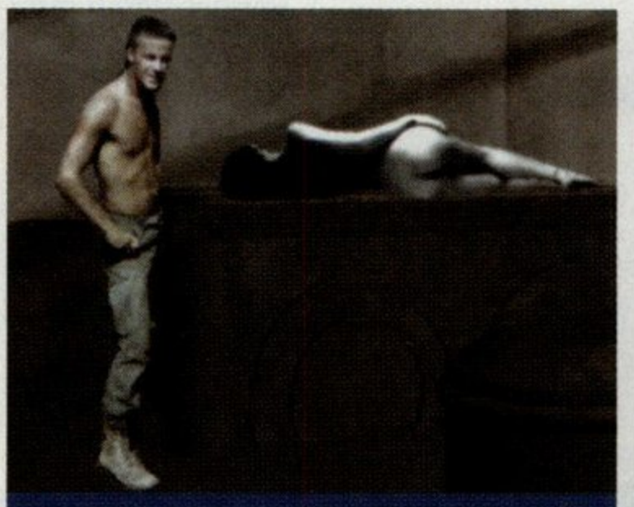
BROADBAND BREEZE ‹ › BROADBAND BREAKER

10Mb	50Mb	150Mb	1Gb
56k friendly	*Modem mare*	*Modem meltdown*	*Nightie night*

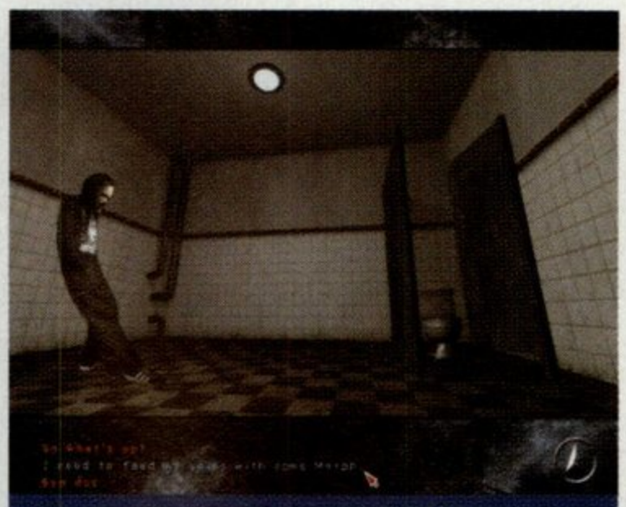
ADVENTURE

Dead City

Although it's still quite lively by Hull's standards



Yes, she *is* dead as well as naked. And yes, he is planning to do that to her.



Play *Dead City* and save yourself the chore of talking to strange men in public toilets.

When your game character does something you didn't tell him to, it's unnerving. When that 'something' is beating a man to death with a shovel it's outright scary. Your character in *Dead City* is a little impulsive, and he's given plenty of provocation in this uncompromising meditation on death, vengeance and insanity. When you realise the necrophiliac gravedigger you've been blackmailing works at the same graveyard in which your murdered girlfriend was recently buried, it's not unreasonable to lose control for a moment.

This is essentially a text adventure with rendered stills – the aforementioned shovel scene is well-written, but in graphical terms the victim's picture just disappears from the screen with a 'clang'.

But given the nature of the content, perhaps it's best that we don't see it happen in too much detail. *Dead City*: free, short and ridiculously dark.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER	
9.35Mb	
DATA FLOW	
Link	nihilis.games.cz/deadcity_eng.html
Discs	Too risqué
Requires	A taste for the macabre
Dark, nasty and highly entertaining	

Wik-ed

Reflexive Entertainment are the guys that brought us *Ricochet* – the *Breakout*-on-steroids game that spread online faster than a Blaster Worm virus. *Wik and the Fable of Souls* is the latest slice of genius from their gaming loaf, a deviously clever fairytale platformer with more charm than a Bond actor. As the web-footed Wik, a Mohican-haired mutant frog, you manoeuvre about the screen via mouse clicks, swinging around and collecting bugs with your elastic tongue. Which you then hand to the lolloping Slotham (the bugs, that is, not the tongue) before he shuffles off the screen. Play it via **www.wikgame.com** or grab the demo on this month's CD

MACHINIMA

SOMETIMES THE HERO

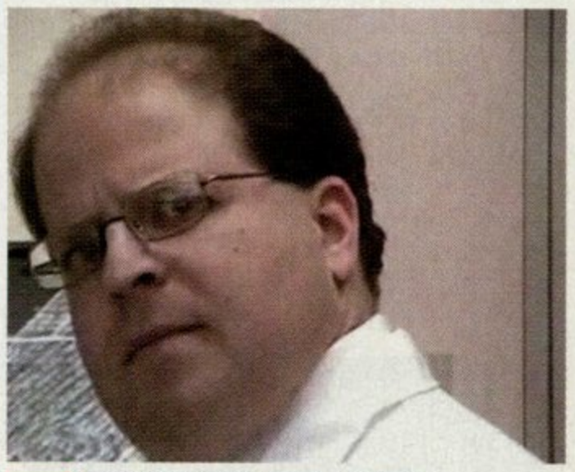
Why should I download it? It's a funny blur of real life and *City of Heroes* footage that won the comedy award at NC Soft's recent movie contest.

DOWN LOADER COMEDY MOVIE

1 BRACE YOURSELF
Our dentist's mouth probing is brought to an abrupt end by an urgent call.

2 DUTY CALLS
It's off to the 'Private Office' for a quick change and a double click to a virtual world.

3 FIGHTING DECAY
The dentist's alter ego causes a few villains to say "Aaaarrghhh!"



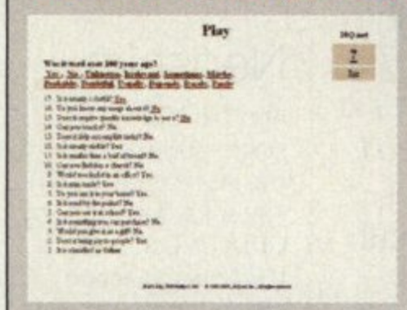
4 BACK TO REALITY
The patient gets his filling and hails the molar molester as a hero. If he only knew.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER	
9Mb	
DATA FLOW	
Link	cityofheroes.com/media/movies.html
Discs	On the CD
Requires	Quicktime Movie Player
Something to get your teeth into	

FILE DUMP

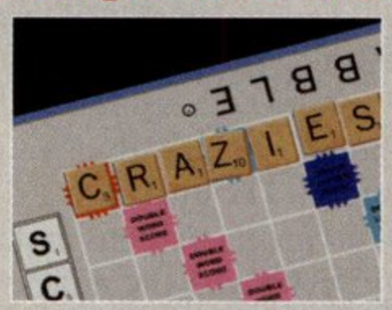
Light Bytes

Tom Francis scavenges the internet for snacks



20 QUESTIONS AI

Somewhere in America a state-funded research project is creating an artificial intelligence by programming it to learn the way a child does, ie, answering all its questions about the world. 20q.net is a much simpler version of that – it learns to play Twenty Questions by remembering what past users have said about the things they were thinking of – but the results are just as eerie. After it won on the concepts of 'computer game', 'CD', 'death' and 'spider-monkey', I tried thinking of 20Q.net itself – it got it in ten questions. The system is now self-aware. **www.20q.net**



CONFESSIONS OF A SCRABBLE NUT

Known as the triple-triple, it's the highest-scoring single move in Scrabble. It's the word 'Craziest' along the top left corner of the board. Two triple-word scores, 'Z' on a double-letter and it uses all your tiles. It's the holy grail for Scrabble players. For the narrator of this hopefully fictional story told via Flash animation, 'holy' is exactly right. The writer makes a religion out of the game, and prays for the triple-triple as a sign from God. When it's cruelly snatched from her hands, 'Craziest' becomes le mot juste. **www.vidlit.com/craziest/craziest.html**

VAMPIRES! AN HTML MMOG

Drink the source-code of your victims in an html-based MMOG-cum-MUD. When you create a new vampire – I'm Tomacula – you get thirty ActionPoints with which to wander the grid-based city and slurp from the necks of humans and other players alike. When you run out you're a sitting duck for other claret connoisseurs, and you regenerate APs at a glacial rate. The idea is that you check back in 24 hours for more stalking – you're no daywalker, after all, and a vampire's life can be quite draining. **quiz.ravenblack.net/blood.pl**

JAPANESE VICE CITY STUNTS

Vice City is a popular game in the world of stunt videos, but Ryo's video stands out as elegance incarnate: the man is a poet with a PCJ. The way he can make the bike caress all three walls of a dead-end in a twisting ascent to the rooftop recalls Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. When he loops the loop off the underside of a crashed school bus, it's impossible to believe that this is the very same machine you've dismounted so unceremoniously, so many times before. **www5e.biglobe.ne.jp/~giitpc/vistunt.wmv**

CONTEST

Making Something Unreal

An achievement of Epic proportions

We all owe Epic a huge debt. Not because they've made the ultimate future sports shooter in *UT 2004*, not even because they're threatening to push the boundaries even further with the *Unreal 3.0* engine but because they've single-handedly revolutionised the mod scene.

Their US$1 Million Making Something *Unreal* contest has, in the last nine months, inspired the gaming community to organise and develop the biggest selection of professional standard mods ever witnessed in PC gaming. The *Unreal* engine has been twisted and contorted to support Star Wars, racing, war, cyberpunk, future sports and aliens. Hundreds of new levels have been mapped, thousands of models and gigabytes of sounds have been created. Thanks to Epic's initiative, the games developers of tomorrow are already tapping into their own potential.

The mod avalanche has taken everyone by surprise, even Epic's ever-exuberant lead games designer and MSU judge, Cliffy B. "We suspected that this would 'prime the pump' but we had no idea to what extent," Cliffy says.

"The contest has essentially created a sense of structure for the mod teams and the standard of submissions is damn near commercial quality.

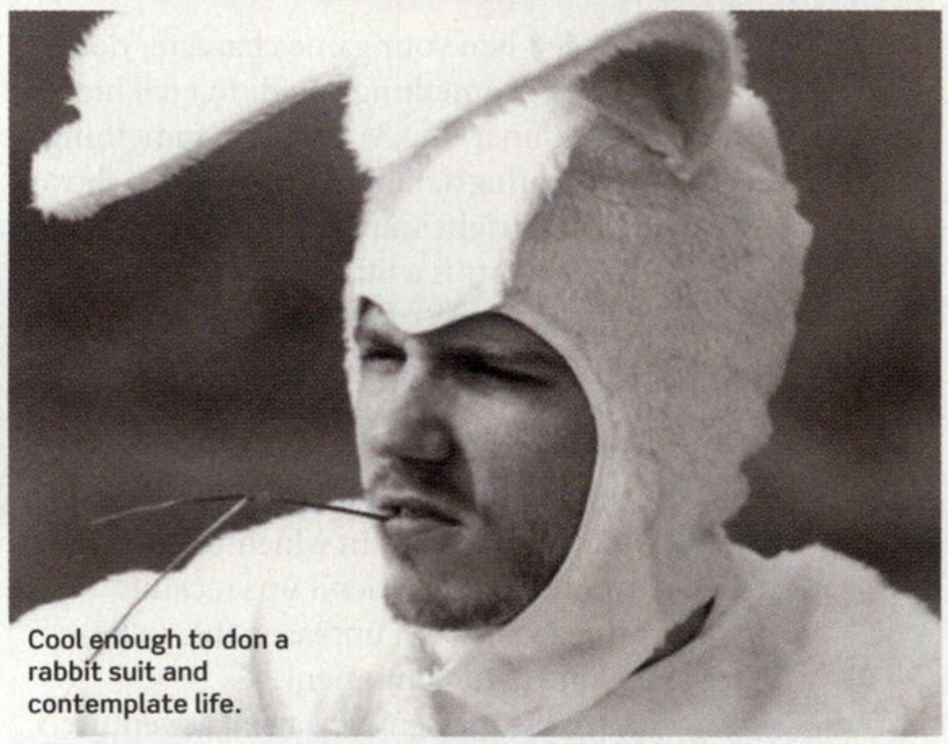
"Every time I think about the beauty of the mod scene in general I'm amazed," he adds.

"How many other entertainment mediums do this? Does Spielberg ship a DVD of The Terminal with a 'build your own Terminal' tool set?" We think not, Cliffy.

The results of the fourth phase of the contest were unknown as we went to press – the grand final entries has also closed, but not yet been judged. The winning mod will claim US$50,000 and, more significantly, a licence for the *Unreal 3.0* engine and the chance to create their own full commercial game.

Whether you're a fan of *UT2004* or not, no PC gamer can deny that Epic are offering their fan base a way to get their foot in the door like no other developer today.

Epic's Cliffy B. So cool it hurts. In fact he's hurting us now. Stop it.



Cool enough to don a rabbit suit and contemplate life.

MAX PAYNE 2 MOD

BATTLE-TACTICS 2

From bullet-time to no-time-at-all, Battle-Tactics 2 hard boils Max's intense, eye-bleeding action into an even more concentrated form.

The winner of the official Rockstar Max Payne 2 modding contest, it's a single-player, modern combat mod with a turn-based twist. You have ten seconds to move, shoot and then find a hiding place, before you're left twiddling your thumbs as the enemy descends upon your position. You've got to make every second count too. The odds in each level is staked heavily against you, with everyone hunting you down.

The mod's host to a number of different game types. Hostage rescue sees you fighting through the masses to rescue the hidden prisoner. Elimination gives you a license to kill everyone in sight and there's a bonus deathmatch mode, played out with AI. This is a brilliant mod, only lacking a multiplayer option.

Calling all mods, indy games, machinima, shareware... Send your links to:

dan@derwenthoward.com.au

UT2004 MOD

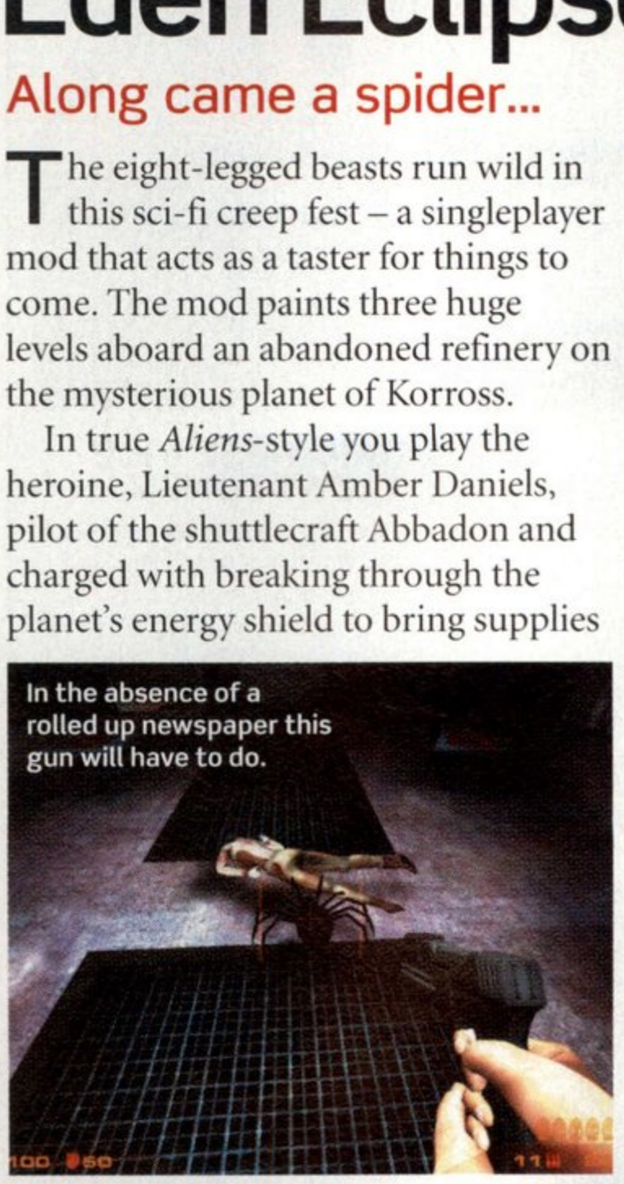
Eden Eclipse

Along came a spider...

The eight-legged beasts run wild in this sci-fi creep fest – a singleplayer mod that acts as a taster for things to come. The mod paints three huge levels aboard an abandoned refinery on the mysterious planet of Korross.

In true *Aliens*-style you play the heroine, Lieutenant Amber Daniels, pilot of the shuttlecraft Abbadon and charged with breaking through the planet's energy shield to bring supplies to the refinery's workers. Within minutes though, it's clear things aren't what they seem. The huge industrial environments are meticulous in detail and, coupled with a bewitching soundtrack, they set your neck hairs tingling as you venture deep into the belly of the plant.

The mod has been built as a showcase for what the team hopes will be a fully-fledged *Unreal*-licensed title, and it already reeks of potential. Be warned though, if you've an aversion to spiders you might want to pull on some plastic pants before firing it up.



In the absence of a rolled up newspaper this gun will have to do.

PC GAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

233Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.edeneclipse.com
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	*UT2004, latest patch*
Skin crawling, sci-fi loneliness. Enjoy	

Neosaka

Another late single-player entry to the MSU contest, *Neosaka*, developed by Little Tin Gods, is a third-person action adventure that brews a mix of Japanese samurai warfare and giant lumbering mechs in a sci-fi world. Set in the belly of an ancient city ship, you're caught in a war with two mega-corporations armed with a trusty Katana sword and a repertoire of acrobatics. But your highly trained melee skills will be stretched to the limit with waves of robotic opponents pointing powerful laser-enhanced weaponry in your very specific direction. They just don't fight fair.

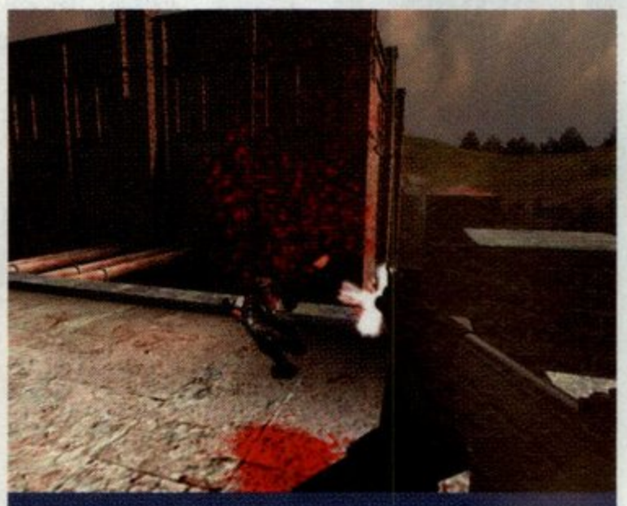
www.Neosaka.com

UT 2004 MOD

Strike Force 2004

Bang up to date

The strike-force, patrolling dark alleys in an industrial wasteland near you.



Rooftop combat, the highlight of the Blast Furnace level. Don't jump, die with dignity.

Updated from the hugely successful *UT* mod, *Strike Force* wins no awards for originality – this is your Terrorist versus Counter Terrorist fare. But developers Vision Studios grab the attention with pure style and panache. This demo only includes the team deathmatch and two maps but they're a couple of beauties.

Playable against bots or online, you get to dodge bullets in the dusty, car strewn streets of the Egyptian town or crawl through the *Stalker*-esque debris of a Russian power station.

Modern day combat modding involves walking that precarious tightrope between realism and fun but *Strike Force* balances on it with one leg and a nonchalant grin.

It's early days and we can expect Vision to port more from the original *UT* mod; combine this with an array of lip-smacking maps (check the site for previews) and you've got yourself an all-out, must-play situation.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

298Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.visionstudiosusa.com
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	*UT2004, latest patch*
A killer in the making	

UT2004 MOD

Action UT2004

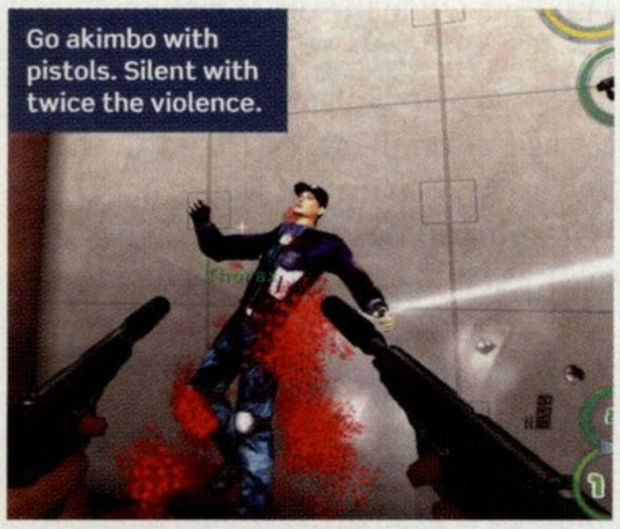
Double action carnage

DOWN LOADER MSU NEW ENTRY

The Action line of mods – *Action Quake 2*, *Half-Life* and now *UT* – transform their sci-fi FPS hosts into spectacular action-film shoot-outs. *Action Quake 2* established the ground rules: instant-kill headshots, pick-ups such as silencers and kevlar, and wounds that bleed until they're bandaged or they kill you. The big addition in *Action UT2004* is mixed akimbo – you can use any combination of two weapons simultaneously, and fire them independently. Anything goes, from a throwing knife and an MP5 to parallel sniper rifles.

The weapons are the lifeblood of the mod. The highlight being the classic handcannon: a shotgun of biblical proportions.

The MSU entry version doesn't have the dive ability they'd planned, and the throwing knives feel a bit flaky but unlike a lot of early betas, it offers a healthy selection of maps. It's not quite a classic yet but, once they sharpen the knives a little more, it may well be.



Go akimbo with pistols. Silent with twice the violence.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

308Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.ateamproductions.net
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	*UT2004, latest patch*
Non-stop gunplay, sharper than ever before	

Will *Deathball* score with the MSU judges? Only time will tell.

TOP MODDING

Modding Classics

The MSU must-haves

The breadth and quality of the MSU comp mods makes *UT2004* worth buying, even if you don't care about the vanilla game. But if you're new to MSU then there's so much to catch up on. All we can do is point you in the direction of some of the high class modding that's taken place over the last few months. The MSU contest has run over four phases with cash prizes awarded at each stage and in each category. Epic have been running the rule over FPS mods, non-FPS mods, levels, models, sounds and even machinima. But things were getting serious as the Grand Final was taking place while PCGA went to press. At this stage the competition narrows to just two categories with just one overall mod claiming the prize – a chance to create their own commercial product in the *Unreal 3.0* engine. What you see below is just a taster... a fine bunch of fives.

THE MOD	THE MAGIC
RED ORCHESTRA	Already a two time winner in the previous phases – is this the favourite? Quite possibly. Speculation aside you've simply got to play it. With some of the best character models in gaming, this is a steady, creeping FPS. http://redorchestramod.gameservers.net/
ALIEN SWARM	Another bookies favourite, *Alien Swarm* walked off with a prize in phase 3. Developed by mod veterans Black Cat Studios (they of *Thievery* fame) it's a top-down, frantic bug-busting shooter with heavy emphasis on cooperative play. www.blackcatgames.com/swarm
TROOPERS	Don't dismiss this as the token *Star Wars* mod, *Troopers* was an early front runner and has hung in there manfully. Multiplayer battles over familiar Lucas territory including Mos Eisely, Yavin and the Death Star trench in X-Wings. www.ut2003troopers.com/
DEATHBALL	Mix American football, soccer and European handball. Throw in some super jumps and pump it with a syringe full of aggression and you have *Deathball*. Brilliantly violent future sports over a splattering of gorgeous, imaginative maps. www.deathball.net
FRAG OPS	Mercenaries versus Special Ops in a modern combat mod that's proved enduringly popular throughout the contest. The latest version includes an ambitious new game type, 'WAR' which drizzles some RTS building over the familiar FPS fare. www.frag-ops.com

The Green Goblin: a prime candidate for Extreme Makeovers.

MOD NEWS

Quake III becomes a Marvel to behold once again

QUAKE III

Spider-Man Dynamic Forces

Making perfect spider sense

Let's face it, we've been short changed. The new Spidey movie had us crying out for the hero, only for Activision to roll out their painfully mediocre action-adventure title and splatter our hopes all over the walls. Not for the first time, it's down to a mod team to resuscitate our dreams – moulding the good old reliable *Quake III* engine into a slinging, swinging combat mod packed with cityscapes and villains.

At the core of *Dynamic Forces* is a versus mode – think Deathmatch in multiplayer or single-player with bots. Here you can choose from Spidey or a series of villains – Green Goblin, Venom, Carnage and Scorpion – and throw yourself into custom maps that include Central Park and Brooklyn Bridge – all giant playpens for web slinging and all-out superhero combat carnage. For a lot of PC gamers, who really got the bum steer with the last *Spider-Man* game, this is a great free way to indulge.

Giant playpens for all-out carnage

A combat system, influenced by the likes of *Oni*, will look after the close quarters scrapping, with characters combining punches and kicks. There will also be plenty of projectiles with players able to lift crates and vehicles and chuck them at enemies. Then there's the superpowers such as the Green Goblin's Zap Glove and Scorpion's Acid Spray, sprinkling deadly energy over the battlefield.

As Spider-Man you have the advantage of spider sense which throbs when an enemy, or their attacks, are in range – although Goblin can mute this with pumpkin bombs. All these superpowers and combat moves will draw on your stamina bar that regenerates with rest, but can turn characters into sitting ducks.

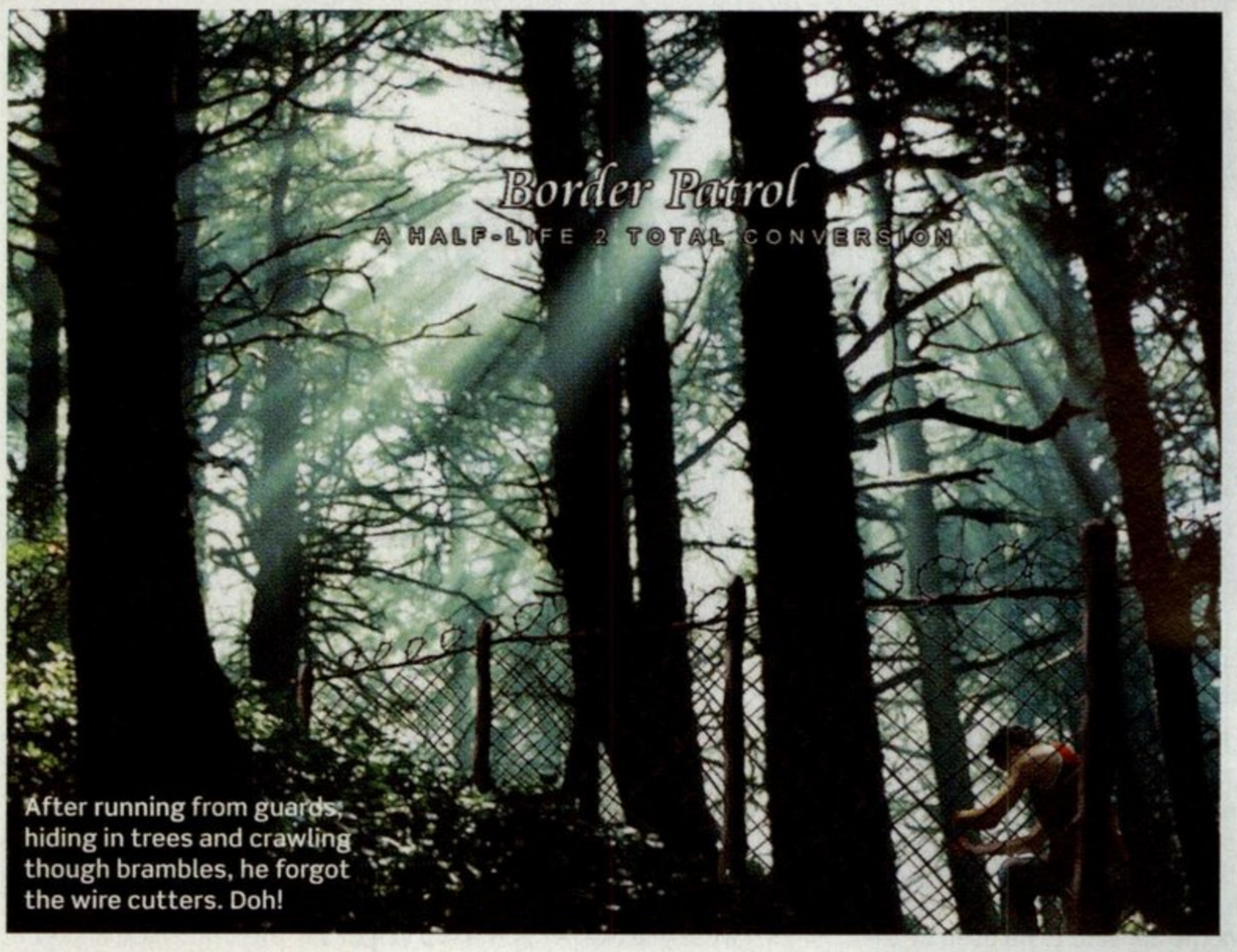
Supplementing this heady deathmatch brew are a couple of fresh game types that include a 'Reporter Mode' where one player assumes the role of alter ego Peter Parker. Here you'll dart about the map snapping villains for points while they try to end your photo spree, eventually swapping places with the villainous player who claims your scalp. Meanwhile, 'Jewel Heist' is a team-based mode that will see one side attempt to snatch a bag of gems from a booby-trapped security building, while the other faction defends the haul.

A one-map alpha build already broke free on the web earlier this year, and, as we write, a full scale beta release is imminent. We're already tingling at the thought.

PC GAMES README

DATA FLOW

Type	Multiplayer
Link	http://dynamic5.gamespy.com/~smdf/
Percentage complete	80%



After running from guards, hiding in trees and crawling though brambles, he forgot the wire cutters. Doh!

HALF-LIFE 2

Border Patrol

The booze cruise gets heavy

Try to imagine swapping a passport for wire cutters, the frown of immigration control for a gun, and jet-lagged early evening legs for limbs ravaged by the damp long grass of an early morning dash for survival. Welcome to your new life.

This forthcoming *Half-Life 2* creation explores the scenario of deserters versus border patrol guards in a mod that mixes an atmosphere of surreptitious sneaking with a looming thundercloud of all-out violence. Choose from the patrol guards, tooled up with modern weaponry and charged with cutting down all who attempt to cross the country lines, or the deserters armed with just their cunning. As an escapee the environment is the most effective weapon. German hills, Mexican deserts and abandoned villages are all settings currently in the works. Some maps encourage a high degree of vehicle-based action, others are designed to promote snake in the long grass chicanery.

Crashing through barricades in a flimsy dune buggy was probably not the brightest idea.

An experience point system gives both sides a way of translating escapes and kills into new equipment and weapons. This gives deserters the means to leave a trail of blazing barricades while the guards can turn to infra-red goggles to stalk their prey.

If you want gadgets, the team are planning an 'Aggressive' mode where both teams get souped up vehicles and a toybox of powerful weaponry – laid out like a buffet for a bloodbath.

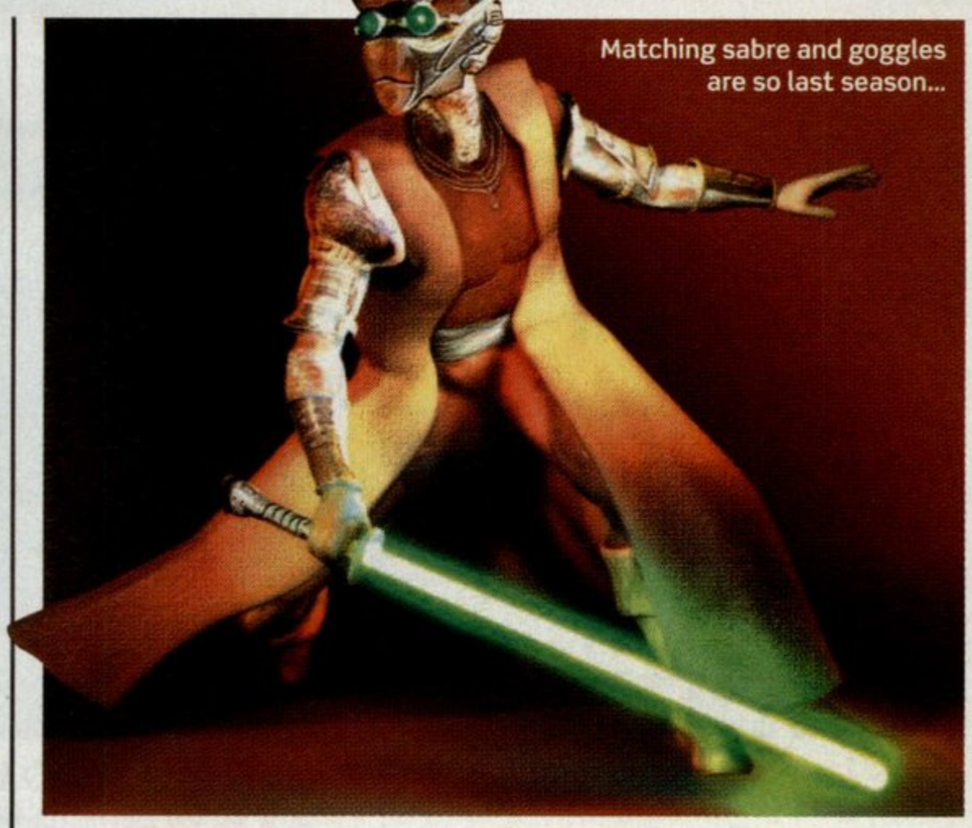
MOD NEWS
ILLEGAL ALIENS

Red sky in the morning. Better heed the warning and lie low for a while.

PC GAMES README

DATA FLOW

Type Multiplayer
Link www.border-patrol.nl
Percentage complete 10%



DOOM 3

Doom 3 Jedi

It's no mind trick

Where there's mods there's Star Wars. *Doom 3* couldn't hold its head up at community meetings without its own Lucas-tinged mod to brag about. And here it is: a deathmatch lightsaber combat mod with Jedis and Siths – think Jedi Knight's best multiplayer bits sucked out of the old Quake III engine and stuffed into the shapely frame of Id's new graphical masterpiece.

"Think of the duel between Luke and Vader at the end of Jedi. We want to capture that mood and feel for the saber combat in our mod," explains team leader David 'Vorrik' Adams.

Force powers will feature as will a number of combat moves with supplementary powers like Force Grip and Lightening.

PC GAMES README

DATA FLOW

Type Multiplayer
Link www.planetdoom.com/doom3jedi
Percentage complete 20%

STALKER

MOD ROUND-UP

So the game's still months away - but the brain cogs of *Stalker* mod teams have been revolving for some time. There are already a promising number of X-Ray engine projects in the works that have us frothing at the bit.

Gangland (www.ganglandmod.tk) threatens to splatter the gibs among the meatballs - brewing up multiplayer team-based action with a 1920's Chicago gangster flavour. Over at www.actofduty.com there's a mod that redefines the term friendly fire, a multiplayer effort that pitches US Marines against US Soldiers. Still with politics, or rather the lack of, Arnie returns in a rather more familiar role over at www.terminatormod.com in a single-player, movie-inspired mod. Finally over at www.red-dawn.cjb.net you can witness the first shots fired in a new future war with some early (ahem) concept art on show.

How to master the basics of *Doom 3* mapping

BY PHOTEKNIX
(Doom3Fortress.net Project Leader & Level Designer)

D-I-Y
A crash course in level editing you can finish in an hour

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

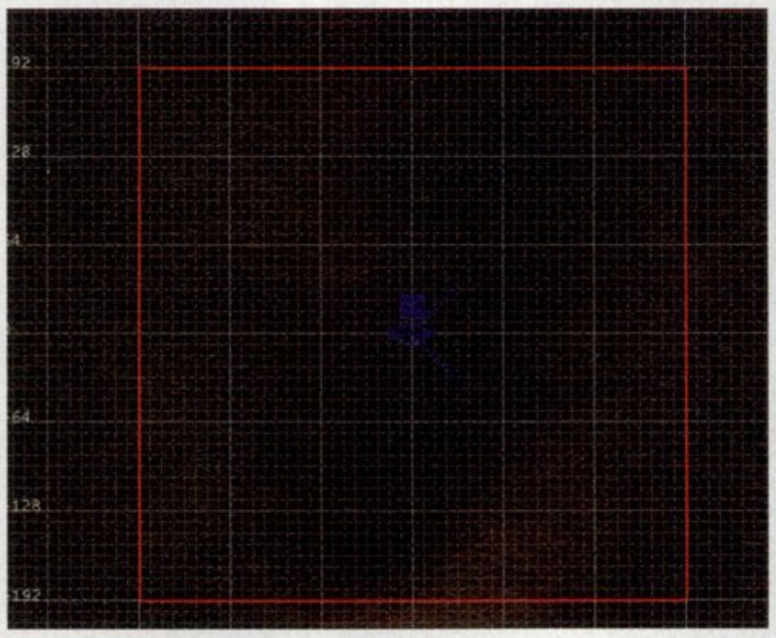
Skill Easy
Time 1 hour

WHAT WILL I NEED?

- Doom 3
  www.idsoftware.com
- Example map
  www.derwenthoward.com/subs/pcga

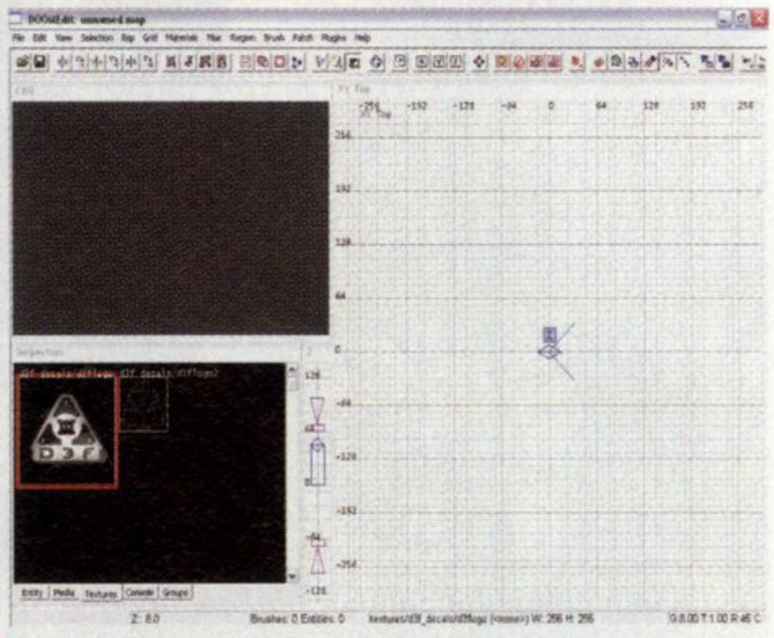
PCGAMES RESOURCE HARVESTER

- **Doom 3 resource tutorials**
  http://blaze.spicelab.net/doom3
- **Doom 3 world tutorials**
  www.doom3world.org/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=3017
- **Mean Arena editing tips**
  www.planetdoom.com/meanarena/doom3_editing.html
- **Video tutorials**
  On the DVD



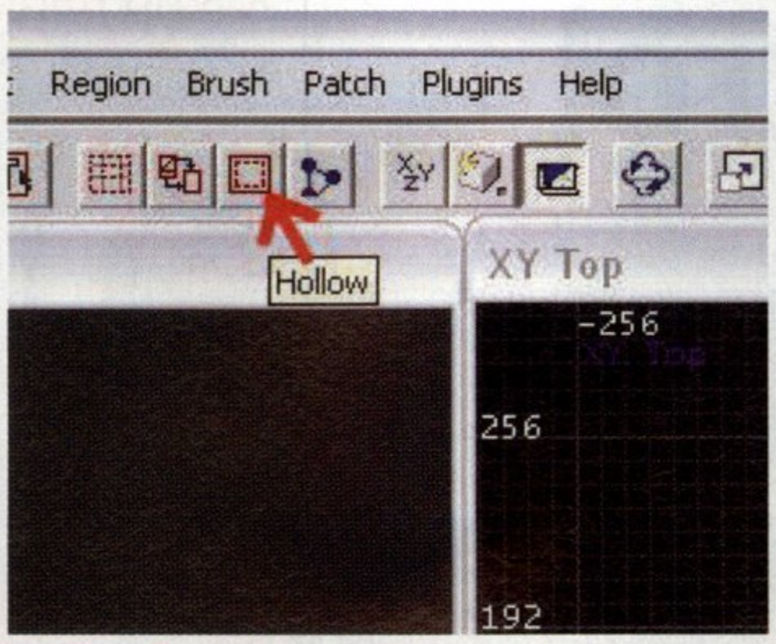
01 FIRING UP THE EDITOR

Doom 3 ships with its own built-in editor, called DOOMedit, which requires typing some console commands to get running. The easiest way to go about this is to create a shortcut with the following line: +set com_allowConsole 1 +set r_fullscreen 0 +editor(insert load1.jpg). com_allowConsole 1 allows the console to be used by the tilde (~) key. r_fullscreen 0 sets the game/editor to windowed mode. +editor runs the editor.



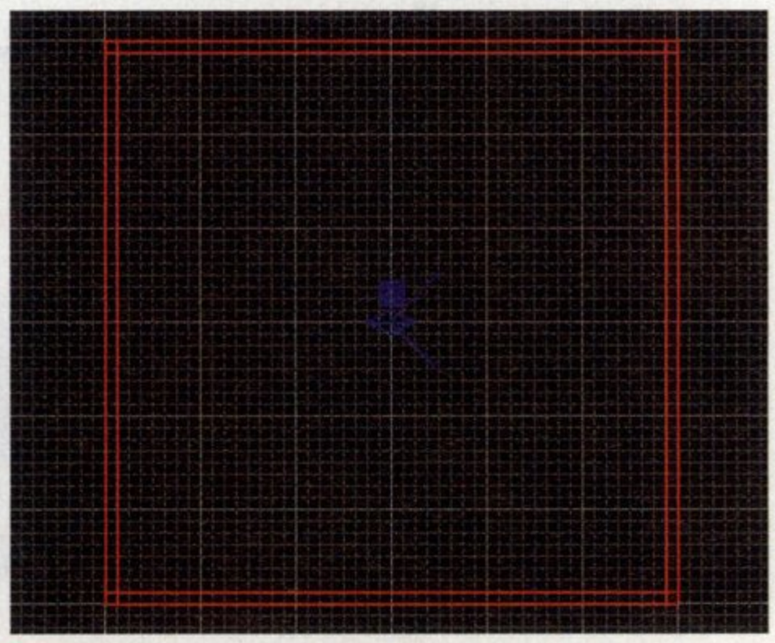
02 WINDOW DRESSING

There are several ways you can set up your windows. Most people use a large window plus the Z window beside it, with the 3D view and Inspectors window to the side as pictured here. If you wish to toggle these windows on and off, go to View > Toggle and select what you like. XY is the top view, XZ is the front view, and YZ is the side view. You can toggle through these in a single window by pressing Ctrl+Tab. You will see that it cycles.



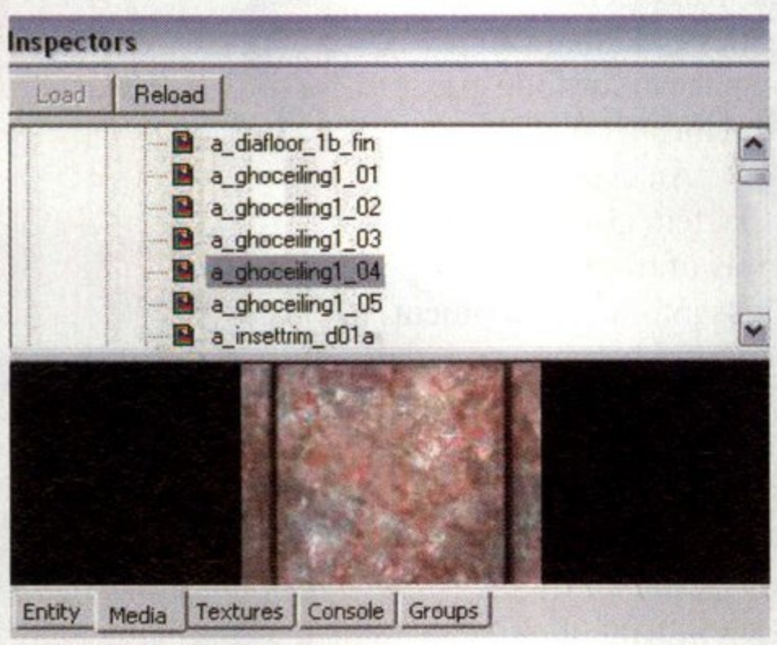
03 THROUGH THE Z WINDOW

Let's have a look at some of the other windows you'll use. The Z window is an odd-looking window that helps with sizing the height or depth of brushes you create. 3D view is where you will see your work being done. You can switch to 'real time' mode by pressing F3. You will have to press F7 every time you make a change to update the 'real time' render. Lastly, the Inspectors window holds tabs for media, textures, entities, groups, and the console.



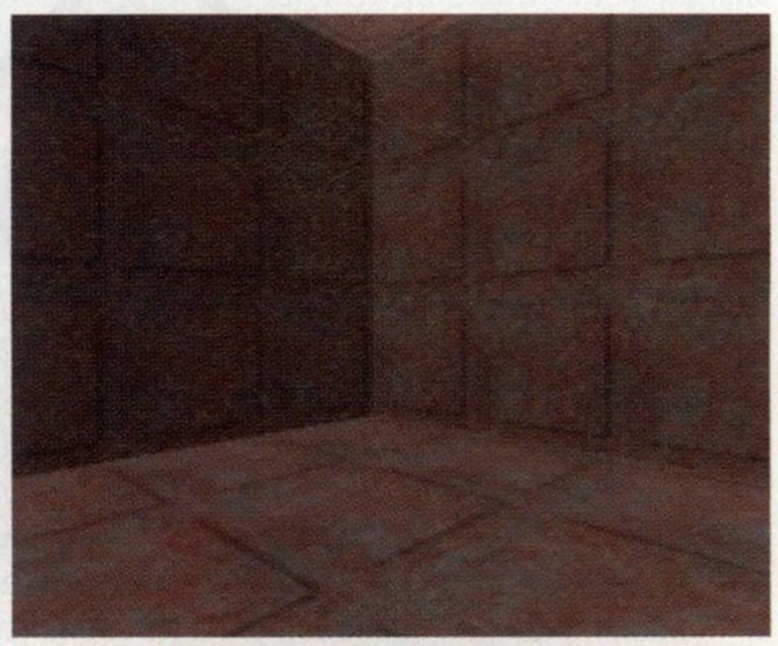
04 MY FIRST ROOM

Left click and drag inside the XYZ window until you have a box. This is how you create 'brushes' – basic 3D building blocks. In this case I'm going to stick with the major grid lines. Now look to your Z window. You will notice a 1-unit rectangle. Our box is only 1 unit tall: we need to change that. Left click just above the rectangle and drag it up. Now you have a box. The easiest way to turn this into a room is using the 'Hollow' tool, visible in the previous step.



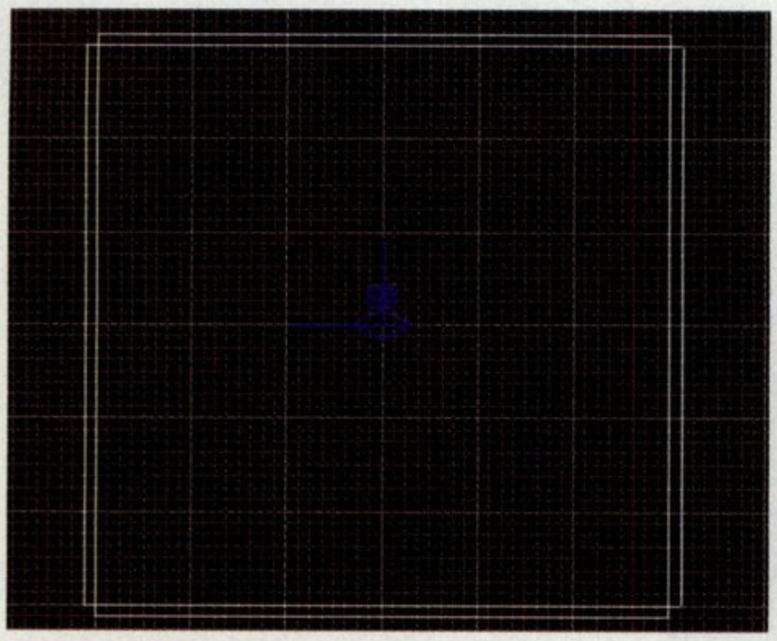
05 ADDING TEXTURES

Currently, we have no texture on our walls. So let us go to the Inspectors window and select the Media tab. Then open up Textures > Textures > base_floor and select texture a_ghoceiling1_04. You will see that texture appear on your walls. Now hit Escape to deselect the brush. If you ever want to apply a texture to a single face, Ctrl+Shift and left click the desired face. You can now apply any texture you wish.



06 CAMERA MOVEMENT

Let's see how our room is shaping up by snapping into 3D view. You'll need to master the camera controls to get the most from this view. The simple way to swing your camera around is using the cursor keys. To move it up and down you'll also need the D and C keys. If you just want to look up and down then the A and Z keys will do the trick. These basic camera moves are all you need to make the 3D view your new best friend.

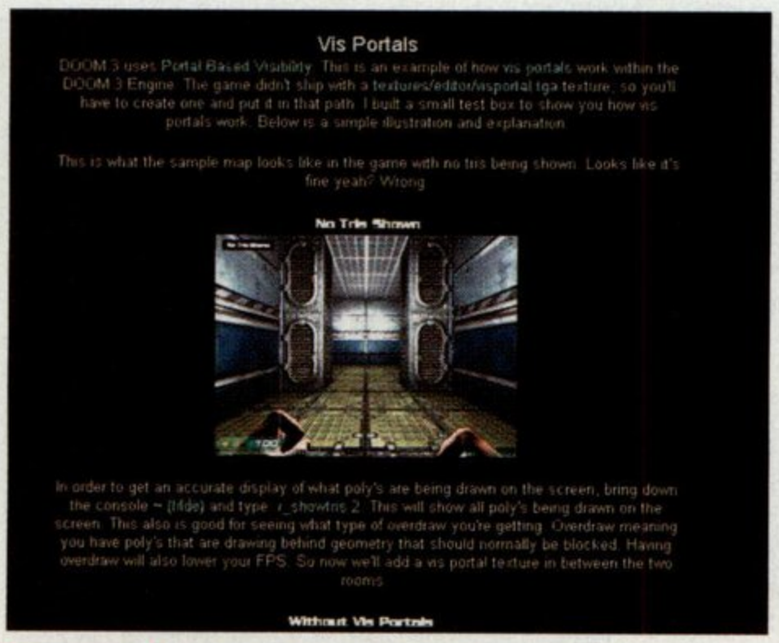


07 ALIGNING BRUSHES

You'll notice that the corners of our walls are overlapping. Not only is this not good for the map or for compiling, but it also messes up texture alignment. We need to select our walls individually and move them out a single unit so only the edges touch. To select a brush (or wall), hold Shift and left click the brush you want to move. Drag it out by one unit. Make sure you do the same for the ceiling and floor brushes.

09 NICE CURVES

Let's make our map a little more interesting with some curved surfaces. Create a brush covering a corner area of your room and make sure it touches the walls, floor, and ceiling. Then use Patch > Bevel. You'll want to rotate the brush until the curve fits the corner. Press Ctrl+I to invert the matrix of the curve. Also press Ctrl+N to naturalize the texture on the curve. You now have a curved corner. Now clone and rotate till each corner in your room is curved.

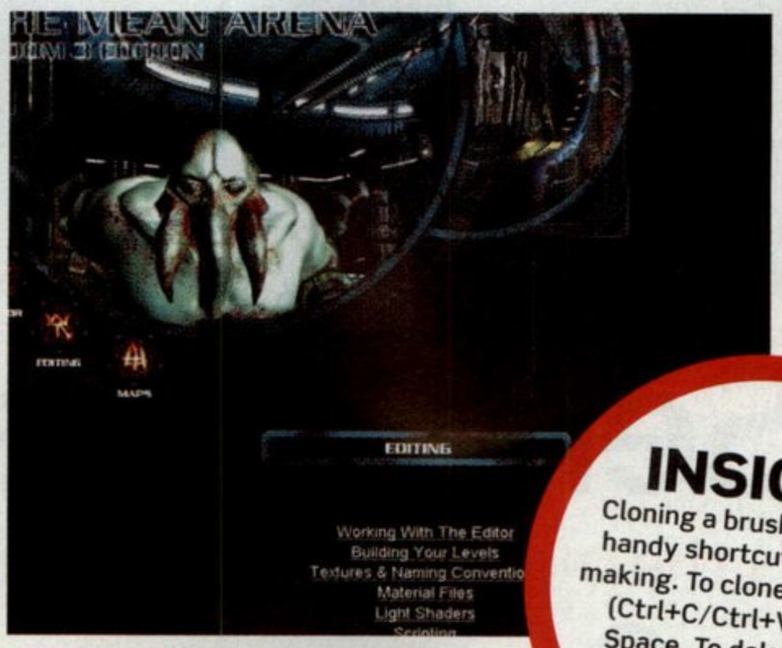

Vis Portals
DOOM 3 uses Portal Based Visibility. This is an example of how vis portals work within the DOOM 3 Engine. The game didn't ship with a textures/editor/visportal tga texture, so you'll have to create one and put it in that path. I built a small test box to show you how vis portals work. Below is a simple illustration and explanation.
This is what the sample map looks like in the game with no vis being shown. Looks like it's fine yeah? Wrong.
No Vis Shown
In order to get an accurate display of what poly's are being drawn on the screen, bring down the console ~ (tilde) and type: r_showtris 2. This will show all poly's being drawn on the screen. This also is good for seeing what type of overdraw you're getting. Overdraw meaning you have poly's that are drawing behind geometry that should normally be blocked. Having overdraw will also lower your FPS. So now we'll add a vis portal texture in between the two rooms.
Without Vis Portals

11 VISPORTALS REVISITED

To create your own visportal, first create a brush you want to use and assign nodraw: textures > common > nodraw. Now select single face on the brush and assign the visportal material: textures > editor > visportal. It's that simple, but do be sure to do more extensive visportal research via online tutorials in the links provided to get a better feel for how they work, because these are a crucial element of *Doom 3* map making.

08 LET THERE BE LIGHT

Lighting in *Doom 3* has become something of an art form, and gets very complicated. Happily, you only need simple light sources when you're starting out. Right click in your room, and select Light. Quick and simple. You can press J to detail the light properties. To explore more lighting techniques you should first play around and experiment. When you're ready, read up on some advanced lighting tutorials which you'll find via the Resource Harvester links.



INSIGHT
Cloning a brush is always a handy shortcut when map making. To clone a brush, use (Ctrl+C/Ctrl+V) or press Space. To delete a brush press backspace. Press Esc to de-select your current brush.

10 VISPORTALS

If the engine has to draw faces we can't see, it will lower the game's performance. Visportals keep down the polygon count and keep your map fast. We don't need them yet, but when your map grows into more then a single room, they'll be very important. Check out www.planetdoom.com/meanarena/doom3_editing.html under 'Visportals' to understand their use.

12 RUNNING YOUR MAP

Now that you've got your room built, you want to run it in-game. Right click in your room, and select info > info_player_start. Make sure your start point is not touching the brushes, and about a unit or two from the floor. The easiest way to run through your map while still working on it is to bring down the console and type 'testmap mymap'. This will compile then run the map. Feel free to add a monster: right click, select monster > monster_zombie_fat.

Design Law Debunked

Not a rule **"The game must behave consistently"**

Dave Morris is lead designer at Elixir

Hume teaches us", says Ghost at the start of Enter the Matrix, "that no matter how many times we drop a stone and it falls to the floor, we never know what will happen the next time."

Most of us at one time conducted our own research in this area armed with a pram, a rattle and a baby's patience for exhaustive experimentation. We're used to the idea that things behave consistently. We like it that way.

True, boardgames and dice-based RPGs allow some scope for surprise. The dice prove that the odds against the Balrog slipping on the cantaloupe and falling down the stairwell really were a million to one. If things like that happened without dice you'd think the designer was having a laugh.

But when we're playing a videogame, we expect things to behave even more consistently than in the real world. Two punches with the brass knuckles should be enough to kill a pedestrian. We come to rely on absolute invariance.

On the other hand, in real life, it's the unexpected outcomes that grab our attention. Like the bit in *Max Payne* where you try the door handle and the whole wall falls down. Stan Laurel did it originally but Sam Lake's genius was to put it in a psycho-thriller.

Moments like that can provide rich moments of comedy – or tragedy. Some will say that you'd just go back and try again to get the outcome you wanted, but even if so, it might have raised a smile. And unexpected outcomes will work best if they're infrequent, or have little bearing on the overall course of the game. Or, best of all, if they take the game in an entirely new direction.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. So I'm looking forward to the day that Ghost's bullets turn to butterflies and dawn comes up like thunder. Because games will be all the better for it.

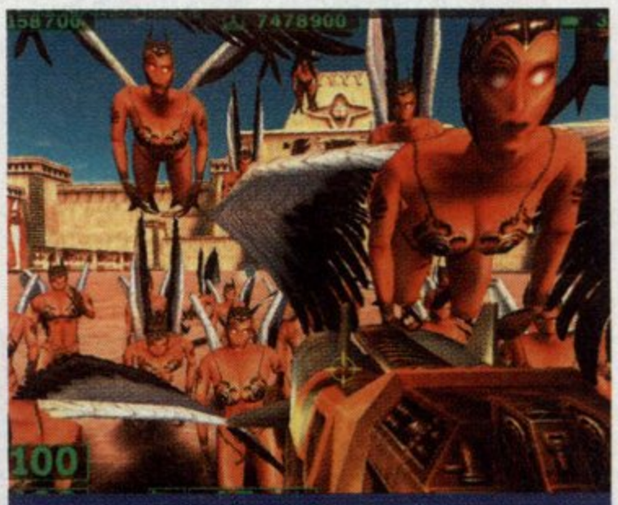
■ **This design column regularly appears in game development trade journal Develop**

Want to write a mod tutorial for PC GAMES ADDICT? Then contact:

dan@derwenthoward.com.au

This boss is over 300 metres high. That means his nipples are six feet wide. At least.

The below-mentioned balloon-heads. There are two former PCGA writers hiding away in this screenshot. True story.



The cold white eyes of a harpie mask its real emotion. It just wants to be your friend. It wants to cuddle you with claws.

Serious Sam

It's the muscles that do for me, baby

This is a first-person shooter without rhyme or reason: a SERIOUS shooter for SERIOUS people. Anything that gets in the way of the shooting is removed. All that's left are open skies, hieroglyphics and carnage. There's no reasoning. Just SERIOUS instinct. Sam is the antithesis of JC Denton. He doesn't possess the style of Cate Archer, or the grace of Garrett. He is the basest of game instincts distilled into six feet of brawn. When decapitated suicide bombers scream around the corner, letting rip with their extended death rattles, he doesn't think "how do they form sounds without an epiglottis?" He just doesn't think.

Two episodes are particularly telling. The first: a parade of mega-headed buffoons, giggling and chirruping to themselves. The second: the ambush by Red Walkers in the dunes, stomping their biomechanical heels into the sand. Against their devastating rockets, you're armed with nothing but a pistol.

LONG PLAY
PLAY IT AGAIN

Played by
Tim Edwards
Played For
One year

The message is clear: this is a very SERIOUS game.

Violence in Sam's world is a tactile thing. Spinning on the spot, finger pressed into the mouse button, wheeling, cutting through the harpies that black out the sun is SERIOUSLY absorbing. Corpses fall out of the sky, shedding feathers, while you track them, still firing, just for fun. When you finally find the super-weapon – two tonnes of cast iron cannon strapped to your right arm – you delight in angle play, bouncing balls off the wall, running over entire legions of day-glo dead horses. As the dust settles, all that's left are bloody skid-marks on the cobbled floors. Go to retrieve the power-ups, and they scurry away, making you chase, playing with you.

It gets better: *Sam* is SERIOUS about games. The best monsters are those with one eye on videogame history. Giant magma beasts that split into two smaller, lesser foes when killed. It's *Asteroids*, with anger. Enemies clamber over the walls: suddenly, you're in *Robotron*. The shotgun is pure *Doom*, down to the click-click-boom rhythm. The rocket launcher is a replica of *Quake*'s: constant firing, no reloading. Nothing must stop the violence.

Yet *Sam* is still relevant. The inclusion of a co-operative mode makes it timeless. Grab a friend, set-up a LAN, and play cannon dodgeball. Ignore the baddies, and just leap around, chucking eight-foot marble balls at each-other. Or just delight in the single-player sensation. Whatever: just take *Sam* SERIOUSLY. If that's a hard ask, you may rethink that once you see the sequel in action, it's looking sincerely impressive.

PCGAMES README

DATA FLOW

First review N/A
Why now? Doom 3 has rekindled our bloodlust
Few games are this SERIOUS about fun. You must step into Sam's shoes.

■ **Publisher** Take Two ■ **Developer** Croteam ■ **Requires** 450MHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** LAN, Online, Up to 16 players ■ **Link** www.serioussam.com
■ **Community** www.seriouszone.com ■ **Influenced by** Doom, Duke Nukem, Robotron ■ **Spiritual successor** Painkiller ■ **Get it from** All good shops for a tenner

The new look PlayStation®2

$249.95 RRP

Downsize not compromise

The new 75% smaller PlayStation®2 is a third of the thickness and packs all the punch of its big brother, with something extra. It plays all PlayStation and PlayStation®2 games, CDs and DVDs straight from the box and now comes network gaming ready.*

fun, anyone?
PlayStation®2

Stand not included. *Broadband internet connection required. "PS" and "PlayStation" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

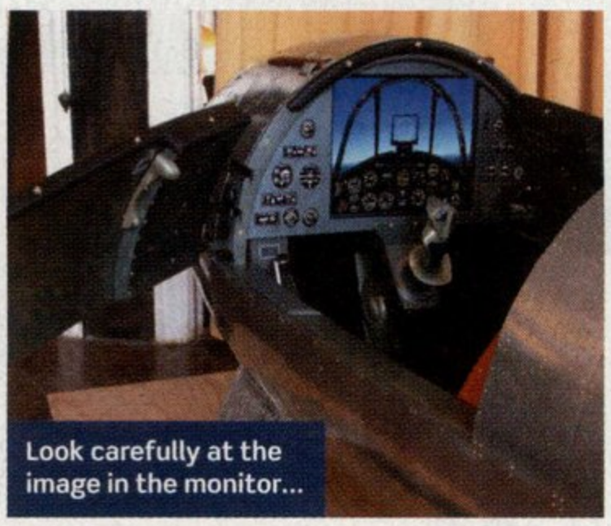
KSPS1601/PCG

FLIGHT CLUB

View from the cockpit

Those magnificent men in their flying PCs

Flight Sim fans are a peculiar breed of eccentric, often seen hunting for the perfect chair and best balanced joystick. And some... some want more than just a simulated experience. They crave the whole cockpit. Francois de Wattteville has spent the last few years building pod-shaped 'rockets' to sit and play flight sims in. He's currently polishing off the chrome wings of the Mark III, built around *IL-2*, having sold the *Flight Sim 2002*-themed Mark II (pictured) to a gamer in Seattle.



Look carefully at the image in the monitor...

Francois is part of a worldwide community of gamers who take their sims seriously. They write their own software, obsess over everything from the click of the switches to the monitors that sit in their faux flightdeck. In fact, Francois hopes his hobby can expand into a business: "I plan on setting up a small workshop, where the rockets will be made entirely by hand, becoming collectible and precious objects like Bugattis or Fabergé Eggs."

■ www.simpit.net/photos

...It's a cockpit. A cockpit inside a cockpit. Call that realistic? Pah.

CULTURE
Where arcade classics meet the literary classics

FURY OF THE FURRIES

FURCADIA

During a 3am virtual world trawl, we happened across *Furcadia*, an isometric MMORPG where 'the animals have learnt to walk on two legs'. "How charming," we thought. It was a day-glo medieval fantasy land, filled with horse-loving roleplayers. And then we stumbled on it: an entirely separate game room where players were invited to experience their own furry fantasies. You can see where this is going. When it loaded, our lovely horsey was haunch naked, surrounded by six or seven equine avatars. It was an orgy: the simple kneeling, standing and lying animations replaced with deviant sexual positions. All around, players arranged themselves in human/horse/hybrid chains... Your reporter made his excuses and left.

■ www.furcadia.com

What's happening in your gaming world?
Tell us your tales of gaming wonder...
pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

WORDPLAY

Arteroids

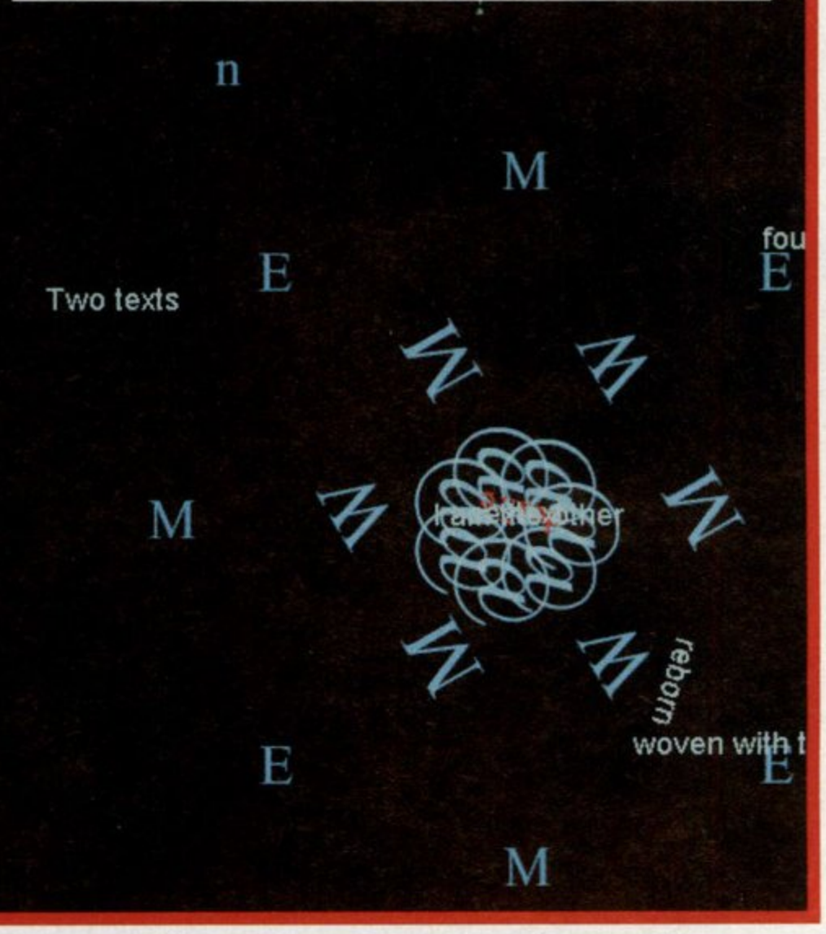
Poetry in motion

Poets have found a new way to display their work: PC games. *Arteroids* is an asteroids clone with a difference – rather than fighting aliens and rocks, you're under a constant literary barrage. Your ship has been replaced by the word desire, and you're attacked by nonsense, words. "Explode", "language eruption", "I am the other", and "what's inside". Shooting the text smashes the letters, scattering them across the screen. It's a bizarre experience, like playing with someone else's stream of consciousness. The sound effects complement the oddness – they're distorted human yelps and screams.

Arteroid's is meant as comment on both poetry and games. Its creator, Jim Douglas, says "*Arteroids* makes poetry suffer in heretofore unsuspected ways. We are aware both of the poetry of suffering and the suffering of poetry. *Arteroids* is not the most probable venue for poetry of suffering but, in game mode, poetry itself does do battle with the forces of dullness and its fate is up to you."

■ vispo.com/arteroids

The original, terser work.



CLOCKWORK

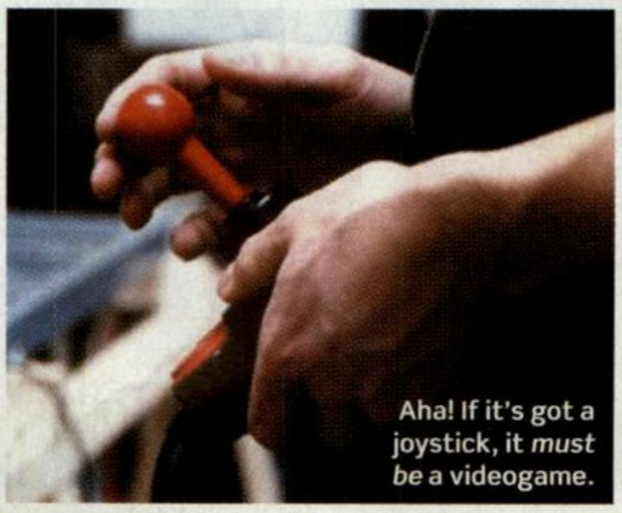
Pongmechanik

Deconstructing the videogame

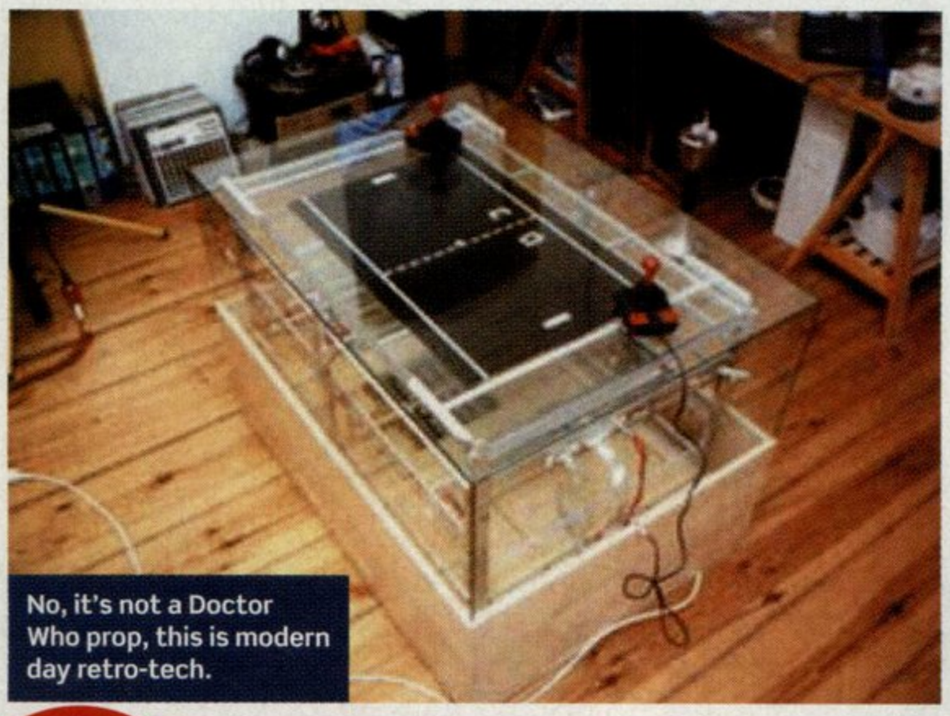
A German art project intends to question the very fabric of videogame creation. *Pongmechanik* is an entirely analogue conversion of the classic ball and bat game, *Pong*. There are no integrated circuits or silicon involved in its creation – instead, under the table are a series of wire pulleys, gears, cogs and levers. *Pongmechanik* is functionally identical to the computer version, yet you can peer into its glass chassis and immediately see *how* the game works. The ball and bats are represented as white plastic white squares under a glass plate, and are moved via levers. Sounds are created by striking wooden blocks with solenoids. It even has a working scoreboard. The aim of the project is to question what we understand of videogames. *Pong* is a game we associate with screens and computers. Yet by creating a physical version of the game, the creators ask fundamental questions. It plays, sounds, feels like a videogame in every way. Yet, it isn't. Does this mean videogames don't have to be computer based? Could we create an FPS, an RTS or sports game without resort to monitors, joypads and keyboards? Is there something within, other than electronics, that makes videogames *videogames*?

■ **www.cyberniklas.de/pongmechanik**

CULTURE NUTS AND BOLTS



Aha! If it's got a joystick, it *must be* a videogame.



No, it's not a Doctor Who prop, this is modern day retro-tech.

PROPAGANDA

SWIFT BOAT

Kuma\War – the first-person shooter that prides itself on the dubious merit of featuring levels created to reflect current situations in real wars around the world – has a new claim to fame. Its developers have announced that they plans to bring US presidential candidate John Kerry's controversial Vietnam War experiences to life, in the "Swift Boat" exercise. Those wacky guys.

In *Kuma\War*'s recreation of that mission, you play, naturally, as Kerry, patrolling the Mekong Delta. You're tasked with rescuing your crewmates from under withering Vietcong fire. You've got a tough act to follow. According to his Bronze star citation, during the incident "Lt. Kerry directed his gunners to provide suppressing fire, while from an exposed position on the bow, his arm bleeding and in pain, with disregard for his personal safety, he pulled the man aboard. Lt. Kerry's calmness, professionalism, and great personal courage under fire were in keeping with the highest traditions of the US Naval Service." No news yet on a complementary *Dodge the Draft, Richboy* game for fans of Bush.

■ **www.kumawar.com**

WHY I LOVE...

›**Game** Star Wars Galaxies ›**Gamer** Mark Sutherns ›**Love affair** Counting virtual money

MAKING MILLIONS IN GALAXIES

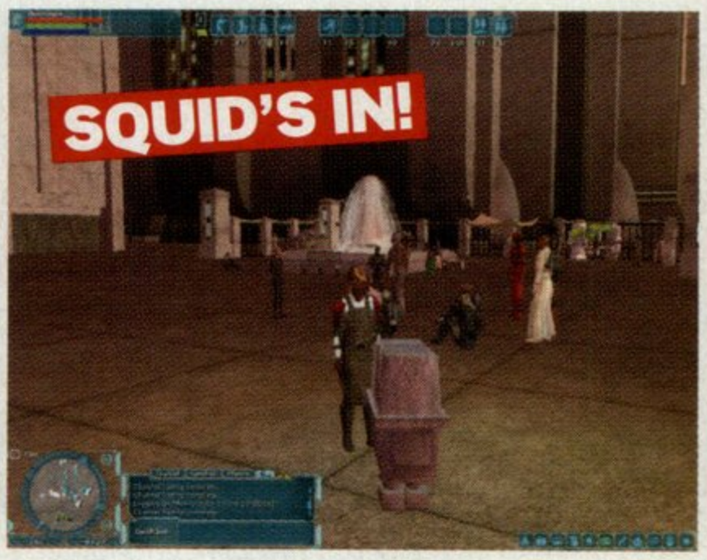
It's a gas, gas, gas

It's been hard. Thix Nevin, my Mon Calamari architect, has struggled to put the blue milk on the table for the last few months, soldiering on despite a dying market. But like all good businessmen Thix has managed to keep his hideous, squid-like head above water – cutting his costs and keeping the accounts simmering around the 10 million-credit mark – waiting patiently for the next big money spinner.

Last month it arrived. Or more accurately, it bubbled up from the planet's surface in the form of the spawning of an ultra rare, uber gas. A crucial ingredient for weaponsmiths throughout the galaxy, this gas hadn't spawned for the past six months. Suddenly there was a mad scramble and the gas rush was on. My heavy gas harvesters were positively flying off the shelves as everyone scrambled to collect the precious stuff. I was struggling to churn out the machines fast enough to meet demand, but had the comfort of watching my credit account swell to spur my work. I toiled on into the night.

Running a business, serving a community and creating a reputation for your character - these are some of the most satisfying MMORPG treats, and *Star Wars Galaxies*, for all its bugbears, offers this potential like no other game around. Thanks to that timely rush of gas rush I'd earned myself another cool four million towards that *Jump to Lightspeed* luxury cruiser I craved. Business was booming, and I was grinning from gill to gill.

1 HARVESTER FESTIVAL
Producing enough harvesters to meet the demand from the gas-guzzlers meant putting my factories to work. These things can grind out components and harvesters while you're off buying up resources. Once I had these babies up and running I could scour the galaxy for cheap resources to keep them purring away.



2 IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE
With 20 harvesters churned out and safely on my vendor screen, it was a case of alerting the needy weaponsmiths to my stock. A quick post on the official trade forums helped, as did my faithful power droid who I parked just outside the busiest spaceport in the galaxy – barking out my advertisement.

EXPERT ADVICE ON PC CASES

A premium PC case can make or break your dreams

BY MIKE ABOLINS

Cold porridge. Sit us in front of a dull grey PC case and that's what immediately springs to mind. It's the complete lack of personality, the frigid indifference of it all. So thank the gods of modifying then, that there are companies like Cooler Master, Thermaltake, Lian Li and others who are constantly striving to bring us custom coachwork for our computers.

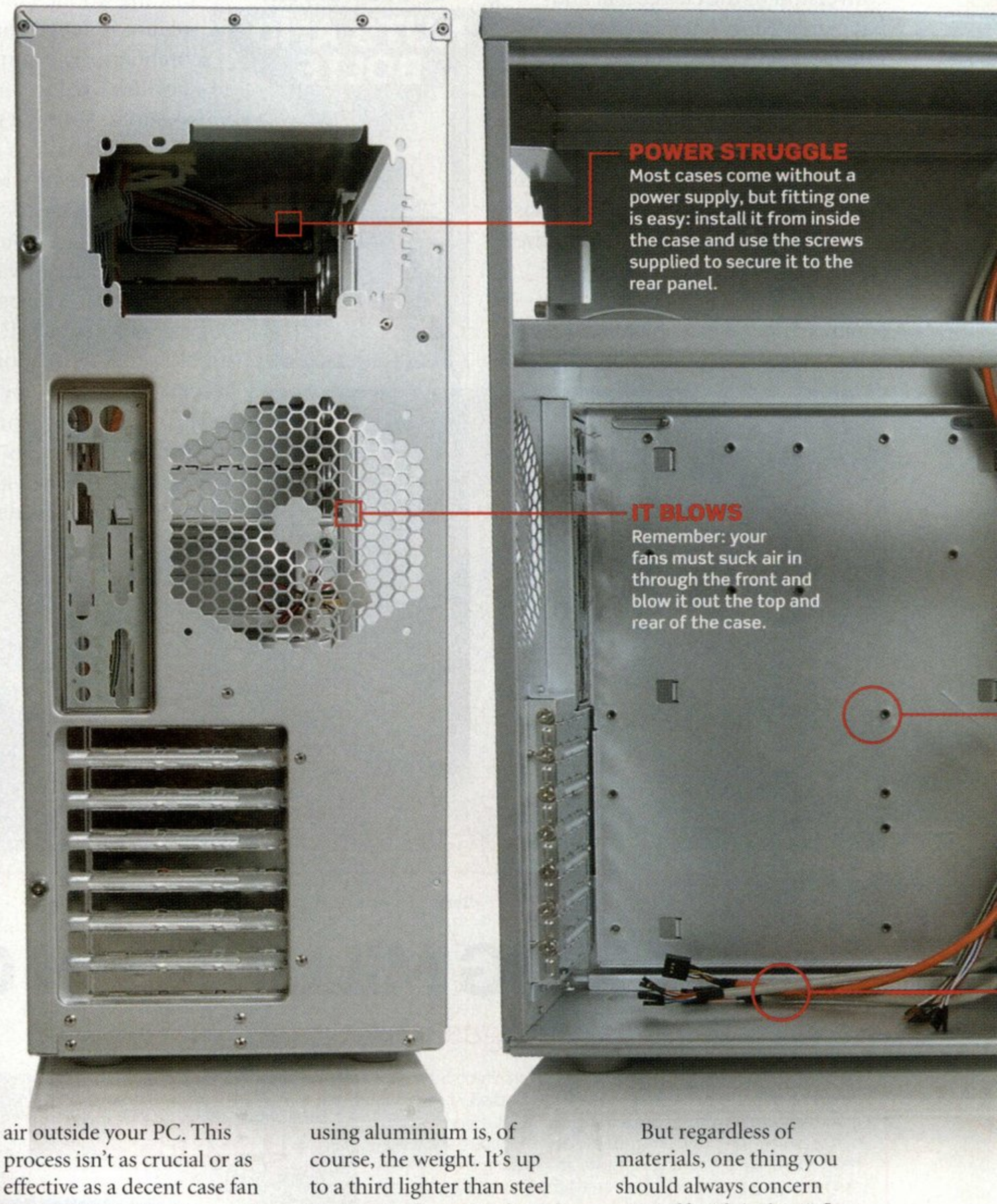
As shallow as we are, even we know that there's more to a case than looks alone. Your PC's case (also referred to as a 'chassis' or 'enclosure') is an essential element of its overall construction and will influence the level of performance that you can achieve from your processor, graphics card and other hardware. This is because your case is effectively the skin of your computer: it's responsible for keeping your computer's innards free from dirt and dust and protected from external electrical interference. It does all this while providing you with the inputs and outputs you need for your peripherals and optical drives, ensuring space for expansion in the future and catering for your sensitive side by muffling the noise generated by your PC's components. On top of all that, it mustn't compromise the computer's performance by enabling excessive levels of heat to build up during operation. This is why, all things considered, it's not unusual to see PC cases selling for upwards of $500; these days they're packing some pretty impressive technology.

Don't even think about plastic cases

Take cooling for instance. Although you probably pay all the attention in the world to the heat sink and cooling fan on your processor or graphics card, and may even have added an extra case fan to your existing PC, did you ever stop to think that the very material that your case is constructed from can influence your system's temperature? The reason that most of the cases on the market today are made from aluminium isn't the fact that it looks nice, or because is doesn't go rusty; it's because it's an excellent conductor of heat. Heat is absorbed by the panels of your case from the air inside your PC, before being radiated into the cooler air outside your PC. This process isn't as crucial or as effective as a decent case fan for cooling your system, but it's complementary nonetheless. For proof, you need look no further than the current batch of cases designed for HTPCs (Home Theatre PCs), which are built from solid aluminium. The Moore Medio (**www.mooremedio.com**) even has cooling fins moulded onto the side panels which act as enormous heat sinks, reducing the dependence of the system on noisy cooling fans.

Another advantage of using aluminium is, of course, the weight. It's up to a third lighter than steel yet practically as sturdy, so is great for lugging to friend's houses or LAN parties. Whatever you do, don't even think about plastic cases, however big an exhibitionist you are. Plastic is a poor conductor of heat and because there's no internal skeleton to the plastic cases on the market (as they'd spoil the view), they're structurally weaker. You can also guarantee that the shiny, scratch and scuff-free finish won't last more than a couple of weeks.

But regardless of materials, one thing you should always concern yourself with is the airflow through the case. In theory, cool air should enter through the front of the case and exit through the rear and ceiling. This is why case fans are so important; they can increase the volume of air moving through your case and over your hot processor and graphics card. If you're at all serious about performance, you'll get a case that has at least three case fans, one in the front (sucking in cool air), one on top (expelling hot air) and one at the rear


POWER STRUGGLE
Most cases come without a power supply, but fitting one is easy: install it from inside the case and use the screws supplied to secure it to the rear panel.
IT BLOWS
Remember: your fans must suck air in through the front and blow it out the top and rear of the case.

SYSTEMS README

›**WHY AM I HERE?** Upgrading to a new case can enable hardware upgrades, enhancing performance and flexibility

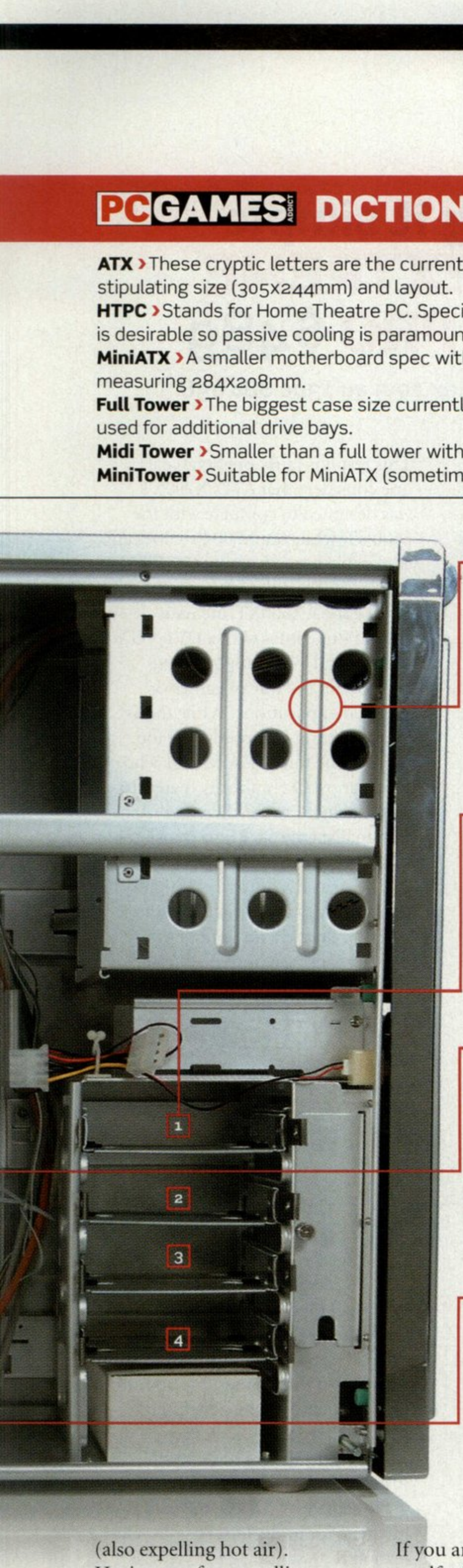
›**RISK FACTOR?** Stick with your old case and you'll be...

›**IS IT EASY?** Upgrading your case is as simple as...

›**SELL IT TO ME...** Processors and graphics cards are running hotter than ever, so keeping your system cool is crucial.

PCGAMES ADDICT DICTIONARY THE OED OF GAMING

ATX › These cryptic letters are the current specification for consumer motherboards, stipulating size (305x244mm) and layout.
HTPC › Stands for Home Theatre PC. Specialist PC for home entertainment. Silent running is desirable so passive cooling is paramount.
MiniATX › A smaller motherboard spec with reduced expansion slots (four instead of six) measuring 284x208mm.
Full Tower › The biggest case size currently available for consumer PCs. The extra height is used for additional drive bays.
Midi Tower › Smaller than a full tower with room for six drives, it'll still take an ATX mobo.
MiniTower › Suitable for MiniATX (sometimes called MicroATX) mobos and four drives.



SCREW YOU
Ensure your optical drives are securely fitted to their holding cage to prevent vibrations when the drive is reading or writing to a disc.

DRIVER 4
Four hard drive bays may seem excessive but some cases have room for six, in case you want to build a server.

COLD CASE
Pentium 4 processors need to be kept cooler than AMD models and benefit from grilles/openings on the side panel to aid cooling.

WIRED UP
The buttons and USB ports on the front panel must be connected to your motherboard. Check your mobo documentation for details.

(also expelling hot air). Having two fans expelling the air and just the one sucking it in also helps lower the air pressure inside the case, so that cool air from outside is drawn in due to the pressure differential.

If you are going to indulge yourself with a new case, there's one issue to keep in mind: future proofing. The IT industry is getting ready to switch to a new motherboard form factor, called BTX (standing for Balanced Technology eXtended, would you believe). It's not revolutionary but does re-jig the layout of components on a motherboard. The processor sits much closer to the front of the case so that it benefits from the influx of cool air that should be coming in from the front, and everything's been laid out to minimise disruption to this airflow, leading to improved cooling of the system as a whole. One of the by-products of this will be quieter systems – passive cooling (such as a heatsink without a fan) can be relied on in most cases, removing the need for noisy cooling fans. Look out for BTX motherboards hitting the mainstream in mid-2005; even though that's a little way off, some cases are offering compatibility now. ATX won't disappear for years yet, but if you want to stay at the cutting edge of technology and performance, you should definitely think BTX. Your PC case is the one part of your system that you shouldn't have to upgrade for at least another ten years, if you don't want to. So go on; ditch the beige box and invest in something more sophisticated with great looks and the tangible benefits and features to back them up.

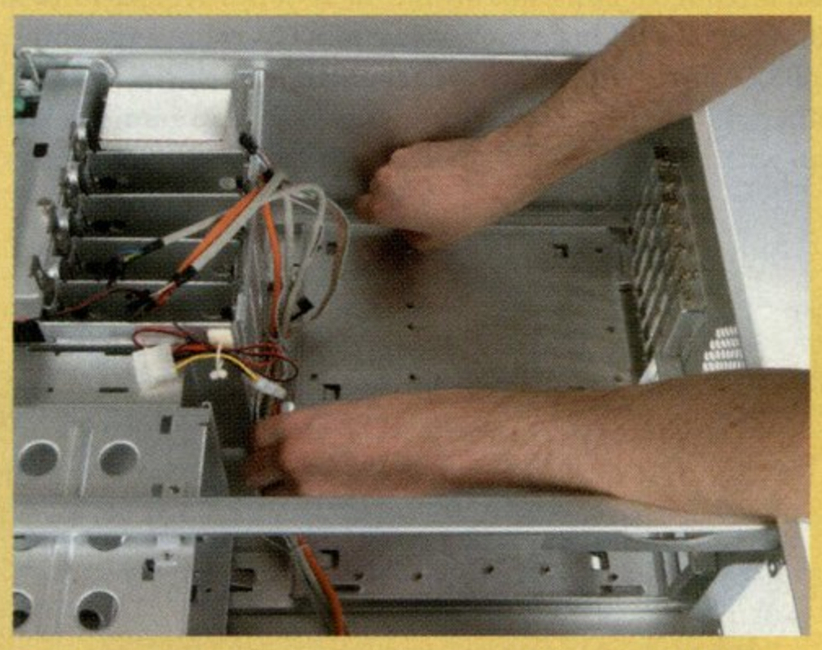
Want a tech topic covered?
Then mail your request to:
asher@derwenthoward.com.au

WHAT NEXT...?

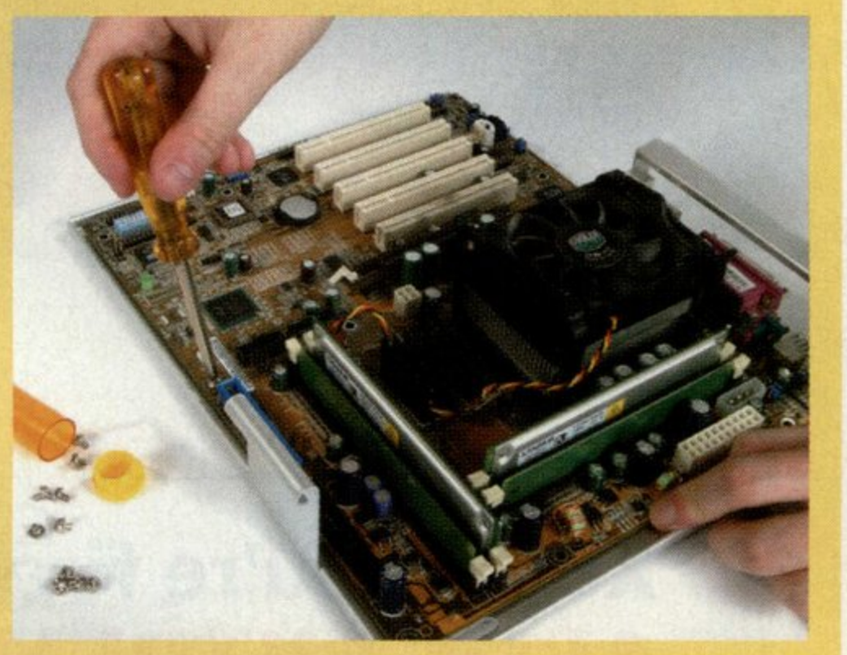
› Consider your future upgrades and think about what size case you'll need in a year's time.
› **BTX is the future, but ATX will be around for a while yet so don't dismiss it.**
› Avoid plastic cases, they're like meteors: pretty, hot and don't last long.
› **Forget about sound insulation as it stops heat escaping as well as the noise.**
› Spend a little extra on a decent case and it'll outlast every other part of your PC.

MASTERCLASS

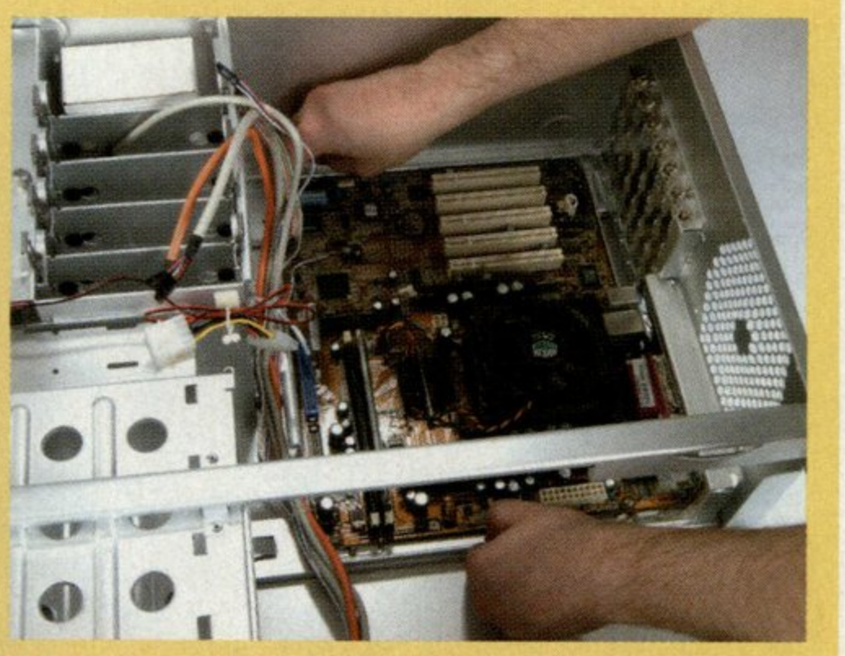
How to... Install your PC into a new case



1 Unpack and open your new case so that it's ready to receive your existing hardware. Fit any motherboard risers that are necessary. If it requires a PSU (Power Supply Unit) to be fitted, do it now. Disconnect your PC from the mains and any other hardware. Get yourself an anti-static wrist strap ($10.95, www.techbuy.com.au) to prevent you causing damage to your PC's components.



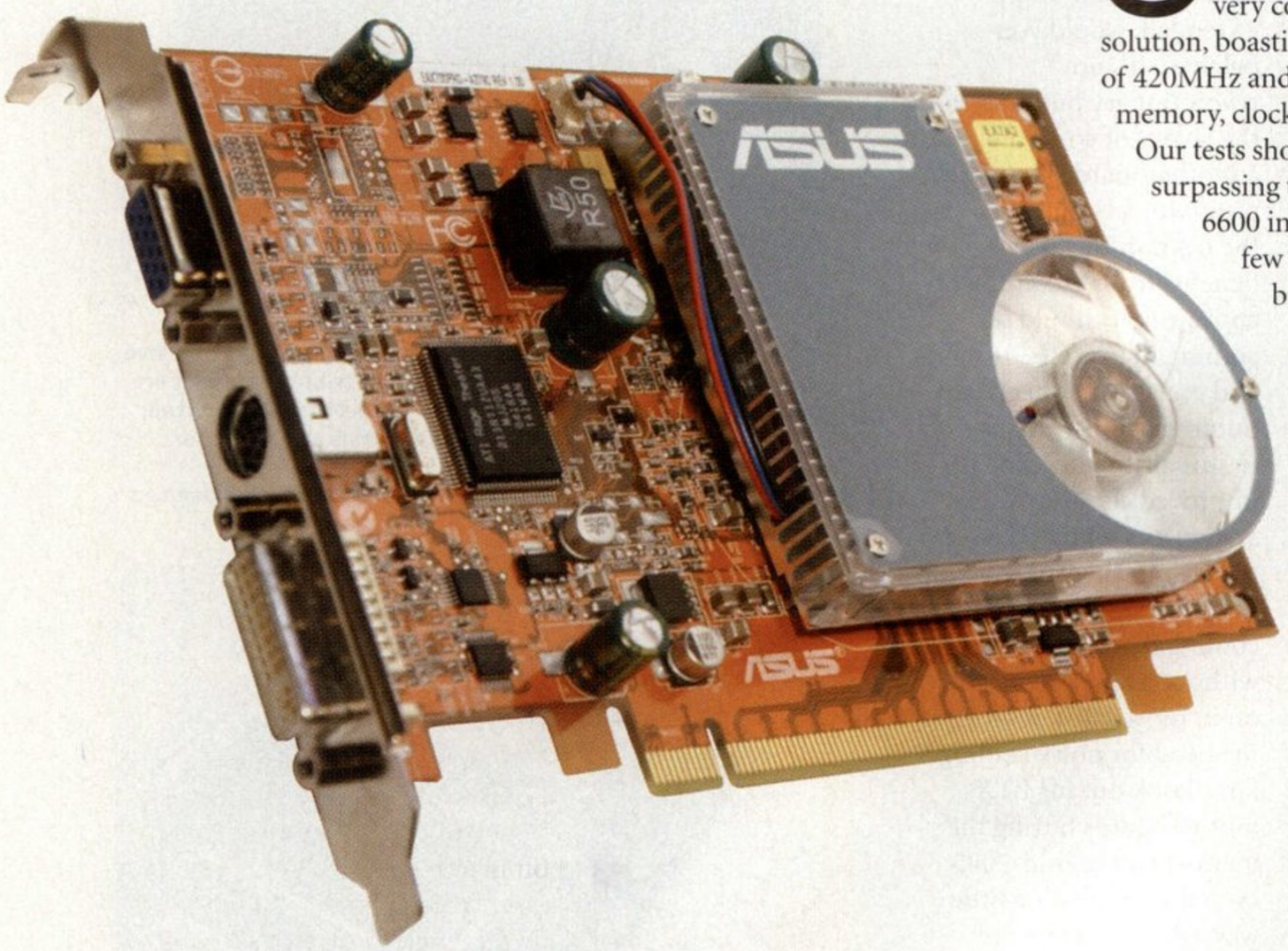
2 Carefully remove the hardware from your old PC case, starting with PCI and AGP expansion cards. Then remove the optical drives and hard drive, unplugging their cables as you go. Disconnect any case fans but leave the RAM, processor and heatsink attached. Before disconnecting the power switch, make a quick note of the connections to the motherboard for later reference.



3 Disconnect the power supply and then undo the screws holding the motherboard to the chassis. Lift the motherboard out of the old case and carefully place it into the new one, lining up the ports with the rear of the case. Secure it in place with the new screws and reconnect the PSU. Connect the power switch and then add the rest of your hardware. See? Easy.

Mid-Range Mayhem

A serious misconception that many vendors have regarding gamers is that all of us hold money as an after-thought in our quest for the highest possible frame-rates. Suffice it to say, the fact that most graphics card sales occur in the mid-low end sector is a testament to the value of lower priced cards (no pun intended). Thus, hot off the heels of our ATI X800XT shootout in issue 28, we're now taking a look at two of ATI's mid-range chipset offerings, the X600XT and the X700Pro. At around half the price of their older brothers, either of these cards will provide an enjoyable gaming experience AND leave you with enough cash to send your kids through University.



Keeping it simple
ASUS EXTREME AX700 PRO $489

Synnex: www.synnex.com.au 1300 880 038

Clearly a direct response to Nvidia's GeForce 6600 release, the X700 Pro is a very competitive mid-range solution, boasting a core clock speed of 420MHz and 256MB of GDDR3 memory, clocked at 866MHz.

Our tests showed the X700 Pro surpassing the regular GeForce 6600 in most tests (only by a few frames at the most), but trailing slightly behind the 6600GT. This result is fairly predictable if one considers that ATI's X700XT was designed to compete with the 6600GT, while the X700 Pro does an admirable job of keeping up with the regular 6600.

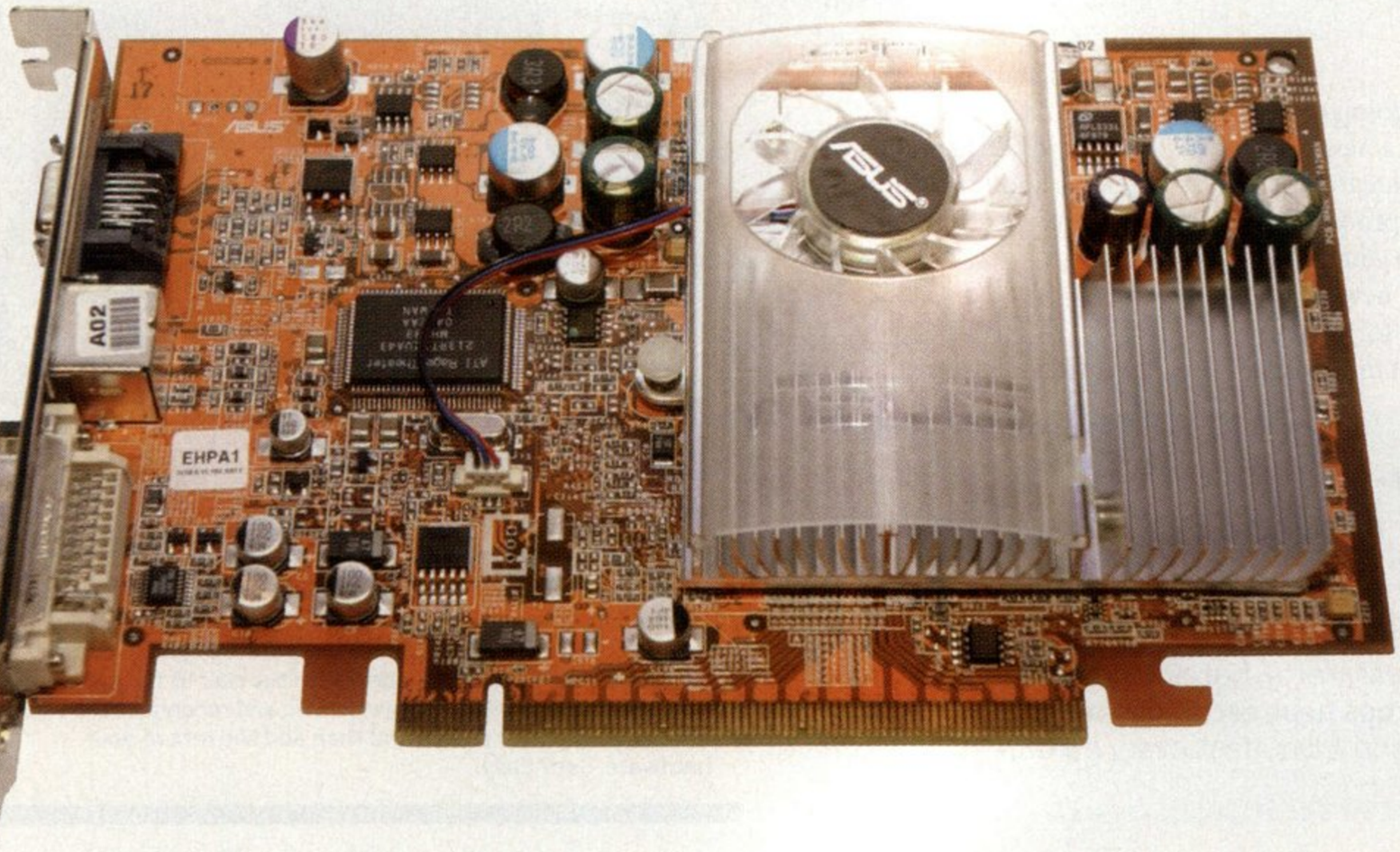
Like the AX600XT, the Asus AX700 Pro comes with a DVI-VGA adapter and VIVO support, but little else in the way of games or bundled applications. While this is disappointing, it shouldn't be too big an issue for PCGA readers who would most likely already own this software anyway. Furthermore, Asus' minimalist approach also translates into a very attractively priced card.

The Asus AX700 Pro is a high-performing, feature-rich mid-range solution that will no doubt be very popular amongst both novice and hardcore gamers.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 85%
VALUE 83%
› You won't find much better for under $500
88%

X600, You're fired!
ASUS EXTREME AX600XT $339

Synnex: www.synnex.com.au 1300 880 038



Being the first native PCIe GPU solution to hit the market, ATI's AX600XT is ideal for the casual gamer, but may not have the grunt required to run graphically intensive games such as *Half-Life 2* or *Doom 3* at enjoyable frame rates. Being simply a repackaged 9600 (the equivalent card in ATI's previous generation), the four pixel pipeline architecture on the AX600XT has trouble competing with other mid-range chipsets that boast up to three times this amount. This is evident in the benchmark scores, where the AX700 Pro outperforms the X600XT by almost 50% in some cases.

Nonetheless, at $339, the card is adequate for budget users, with Asus' version representing great value as it comes bundled with Deus Ex: Invisible War, U lead Cool3D 2.0 + PhotoExpress 4.0 SE, Asus DVD XP and Power Director 3, as well as a DVI-VGA adapter for flexible dual-monitor support, a 9-pin S-Video to Composite VIVO (Video-In, Video-Out) cable and a HDTV adapter. The VIVO quality is exceptional, so it's disappointing to see the card fall flat in the performance stakes for any serious gamer.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 70%
VALUE 85%
› More a budget fix than a gamer's card
79%

On the case

THERMALTAKE XASER V DAMIER V5000

$250

Anyware: www.anywhere.com.au (02) 9879 5788

PCGAMES GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

KEY FEATURES

- **5 5inch drive bays (one taken with fan controller)**
- 2 3.5 inch floppy bays
- **3 Hard drive bays**
- 2 USB ports
- **1 Firewire port**
- 5 Fan capacity

Like Golden Retrievers for hip youngsters, and the macchiato for the affluent upper-class, the once bland, beige PC chassis is now a fashion accessory. No longer are they purchased for the sole purpose of keeping our components safe - today aesthetics are of equal, if not greater importance than functionality. Entire industries have spawned to cater for this market, with avid LAN-party goers spending significant amounts of money to adorn their PCs with cathode lights and Perspex windows, money that could be spent on tangibly improving their computing experience.

More recently, companies such as ThermalTake have attempted to make this process both convenient and inexpensive for the average user with the introduction of pre-modded cases. One such product is the Xaser V Damier V5000.

Whilst we're on the topic of aesthetics, it must be noted that this is one of the most elegant cases to ever grace the PCGA labs, with its blue aluminium/steel (mostly steel) chassis complemented nicely by five blue LED case fans and a clear Perspex window. While the sound of five fans whirring simultaneously is far from inaudible, this is a god-send for overclockers who require a constant flow of cool air reaching their components to ensure maximum stability. Furthermore, when you're not gaming or performing other system-intensive tasks, the included four-channel fan controller enables users to adjust the voltage supplied to each fan, effectively increasing or decreasing the speed at which they spin and thus, noise output. It also features a handy LCD screen for temperature monitoring, and will even sound an alarm if temperatures reach a certain level.

Although the fan controller eliminates one 5-inch drive bay, there's still another four available, in addition to two 3.5-inch bays and three hard drive bays. As if that wasn't enough, the top of the case features two USB ports, audio inputs, and a single firewire port, and the entire front panel is covered by an aluminium door which can be key-locked for security.

Despite being a full-tower, the plethora of features packed into the V5000 results in an obvious trade-off in terms of usability. Specifically, installation is hindered somewhat by the tangle of cables that connect each fan to the power supply and fan controller, as well as the front ports to the motherboard. That said, ThermalTake have done their best to make this a painless process, labelling each cable in case users are required to disconnect any of them in order to install components. Additionally, once the motherboard is in place, swapping out expansion cards and drives is a breeze, as aided by the screw-less locking clips and tool-free sliding drive bays.

Perhaps the V5000's only downfall is its weight, which can be a significant hindrance as, although the flamboyant design will undeniably impress, it's unlikely that you'll be taking this behemoth out of your bedroom to show it off in the first place. It's not a nomad's choice.

Nonetheless, the V5000's excellent build quality, logical internal design and impressive feature-set places it head and shoulders above any other case that's passed through the PCGA labs in the past six months.

REVIEW CRITERIA

WE'RE LOOKING FOR...

- **Interior Access** How easy or difficult is it to work on your system's internal hardware?
- **Cooling** Keeping your system cool is a priority, so are there enough case fans to prevent overheating?
- **Looks** The way your case looks reflects on you; are you a kicker or the kiddie?
- **Convenience** Are there front-mounted ports and connectors for pads and joysticks to make gaming more comfortable?
- **Portability** What kind of travelling companion is it when you head to a LAN party? Hernia-inducing or light as a feather?
- **Bonuses** What do you get for your money? Is the case empty or are the requisite fans and power supply thrown in?

PCGAMES ADDICT

PERFORMANCE 89%
VALUE 91%

90%

- A textbook case of top PC housing

Armchair Commander

As any player of team-based games such as *Counter-Strike* will tell you, effective communications and fluid strategy is essential for successful clan battles - a difficult feat to achieve in the heat of battle. Thus, the most effective method of communicating to other players is undoubtedly voice, which not only allows for versatility in strategy making but also improves player immersion. Even if your preferred game doesn't have this feature built in, there are plenty of third-party applications (e.g. Ventrilo) that do the same job just as well. As far as hardware is concerned, while many are happy to stick with the $10 headset they purchased from Dick Smith, a quality solution created with gamers in mind is far more desirable. Enter Plantronics' new Gamecom line.

Digital delight
PLANTRONICS GAMECOM PRO 1
$149

Text100: www.text100.com.au **(02) 9956 5733**

PCGAMES GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

Operating independently of the sound card, the Gamecom Pro 1 plugs directly into a spare USB port with its 32-bit digital signal processor converting analog audio signals into crisp, clearer digital waves. The fact that this conversion is performed in real-time by an independent processor (rather than the CPU) frees up your processor for gaming tasks, ensuring maximum FPS.

Installation of the headphones is patronisingly simple, while the padded ear cups and flexible shape results in complete comfort during lengthy gaming sessions. Sound quality is exceptional for such an inexpensive headset, with the 40mm, 48 kHz speakers being capable of producing thundering bass effects and clear sound reproduction in both the low and high-end of the spectrum, with volume levels being adequate for even the most rave-damaged ears. Albeit, audio positioning could be improved, as during heated battles it's often difficult to pin-point the exact location of an enemy – a minor flaw. The microphone is completely adjustable for comfort and can be retracted when not in use, while Plantronics' effective noise cancelling technology ensures that your spouse/parent/brother's background whining cannot be picked up by other players. Overall, a high-quality, fairly inexpensive head-set that's more than adequate for both the casual and hardened gamer alike.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 90%
VALUE 85%
› Top 2-way cans with a few minor flaws
90%

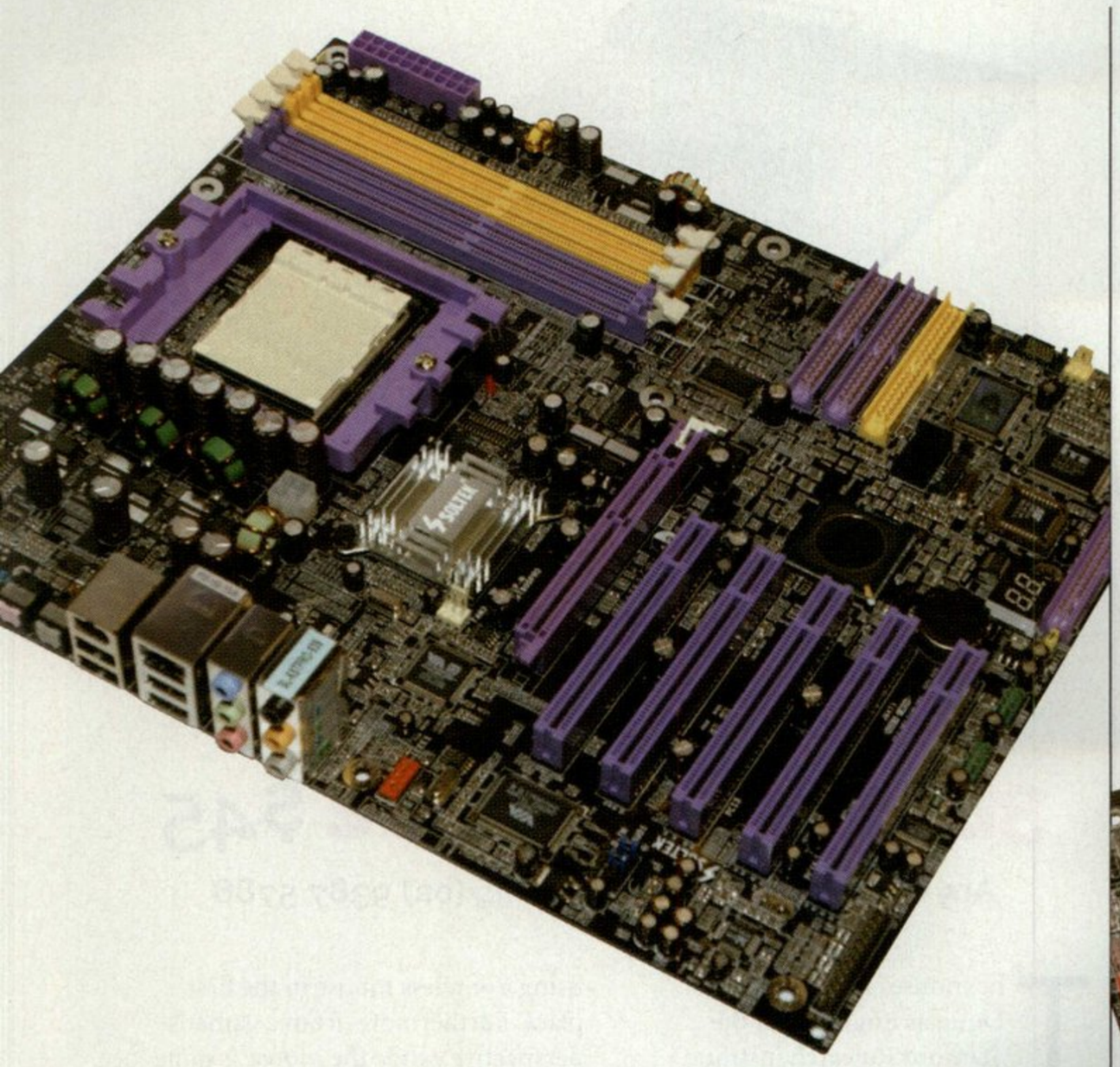
Cheap as chips
PLANTRONICS GAMECOM 1
$60

Text100: www.text100.com.au (02) 9956 5733

Right down to the physical design and microphone used, the Gamecom 1 is almost identical to the 'Pro' flavour, with the only exception being the fact that it's an analog headset that must be plugged into a sound card. This makes is just as comfortable to use for extended periods of time, with the unit moulding to a variety of head-shapes nicely. However, being targeted at those on a tighter budget, sound quality isn't nearly as impressive, with the speakers struggling somewhat to produce believable bass effects, while sound reproduction is slightly muffled at higher volume levels.

Although DVD and music playback is surprisingly impressive for a $60 pair of headphones, gamers looking for complete immersion may find the atmosphere somewhat lacking. The Gamecom 1 provides great value for money and its audio quality compares favourably to other similarly priced units, however, hardcore gamers should definitely shell out the extra $90 for the digital, 'Pro' version.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 79%
VALUE 90%
› Budget price, mid-range performance
82%



All aboard!

SOLTEK K8TPRO-939

$159

Sato Technology: www.satotech.com.au (02) 9748 2999

Soltek's motherboards are renowned for offering excellent value for money, and the K8TPro-939 is certainly no exception. Based around the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the board supports Socket-939 Athlon 64 processors – making it a worthy companion to your shiny new Athlon 64 4000+ CPU (reviewed next issue).

With such a great deal of competition in today's motherboard market, bundled software and accessories is just as important as the board itself, and the K8TPro-939 is certainly no slouch in this regard. Not only has Soltek included all of the cables required to put a system together (IDE, Floppy, SATA), but it's also added a number of bonus utilities such as PC-Cillin 2004, RestoreIT! 3 Lite, DriveImage 4.0, Virtual Drive 7 and Partition Magic 6.0 SE – all of which are imperative to maintaining a secure and well backed up system.

The board itself includes all of the mandatory features and many more, boasting an 8-channel AC97 audio codec, a standard firewire port, four USB 2.0 ports, five PCI slots, four SerialATA connectors (two provided by the southbridge and a further two by an onboard Promise controller) and a Gigabit Ethernet port utilising the VIA VT6122 chip. Although the AC97 audio codec is sufficient for the casual gamer, it's not the highest quality onboard audio solution available, especially considering the fact that most boards based around this chipset have adopted the superior VIA Envy codec. An onboard wireless chip would've been handy, too.

Conversely, compared to other Socket 939 boards we've tested, the layout of the K8TPro-939 is undoubtedly superior, with the ATX and IDE connectors all in logical positions in order to allow for maximum airflow and speedy, painless installation.

The BIOS includes the plethora of tweaking options necessary for an avid overclocker, including frequency/voltage adjustments in small increments and an ample selection of CPU/DRAM ratios.

The board's performance is on par with the other K8T800 boards we've tested, while stability is second to none, with the board lasting through 48 hours of 3DMark loops without a single crash.

PC GAMES ADDICT

PERFORMANCE 87%
VALUE 93%

89%

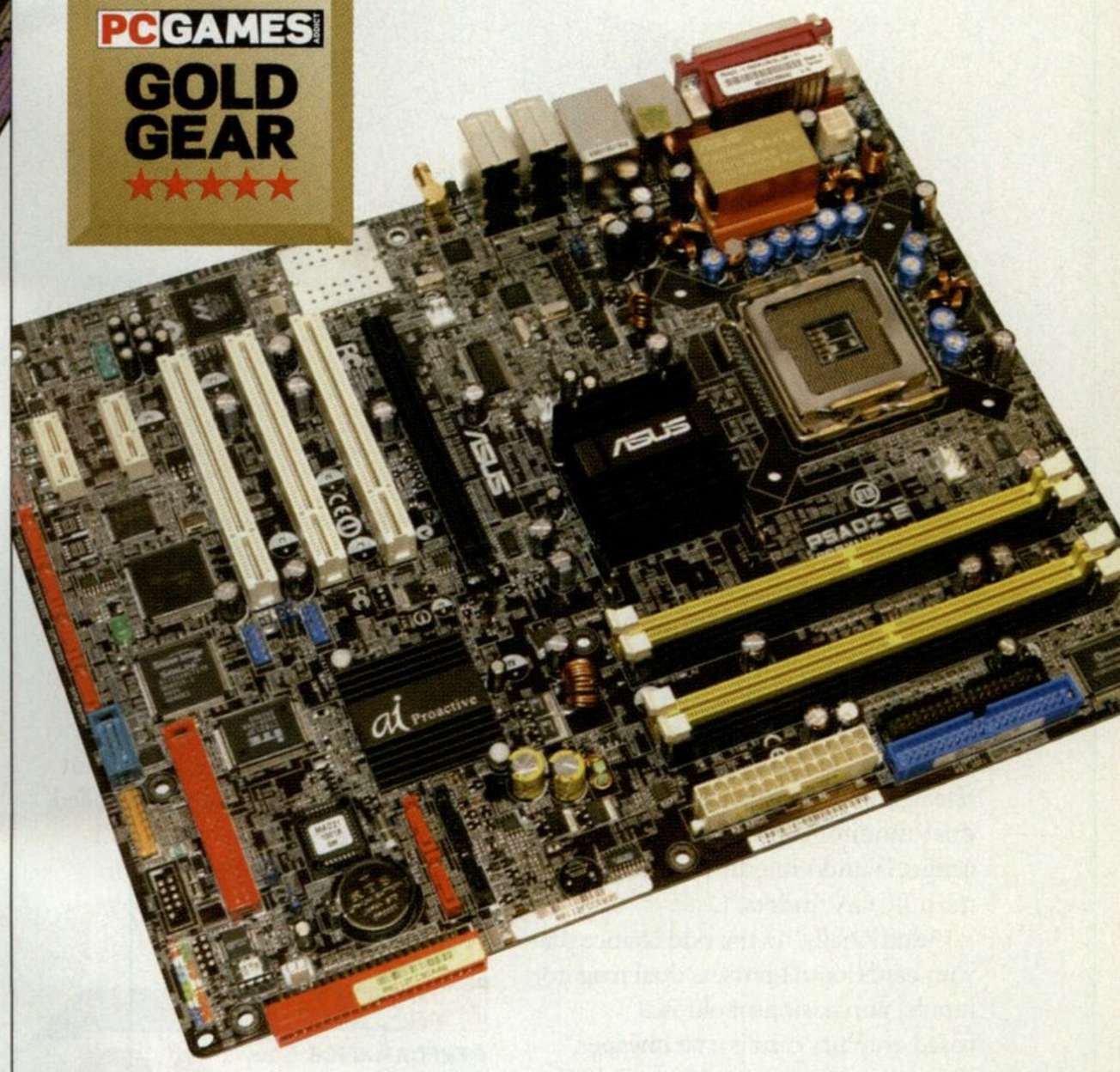
›It's not perfect, but is brilliant value

In the fast lane

ASUS P5AD2-E

$499

Synnex: www.synnex.com.au 1300 880 038



The Asus P5AD2-E is ideal for those looking for an easier transition to the i925XE chipset, featuring three regular PCI slots as well as a Firewire 400 port (in addition to two Firewire 800 ports). However, this convenience is at the expense of its PCI-Express support, with the board including just two PCI-X x1 slots which may prove inadequate once adoption of the new standard increases. Further, the complete range of ports is enabled by no less than three additional backplates, which will negate the extra PCI slots entirely for those with smaller enclosures.

Despite these flaws the P5AD2-E is certainly one of the most feature-rich boards to pass through our labs, featuring eight USB 2.0 ports, dual gigabit LAN, eight SerialATA interfaces, 24-bit 192kHz High-Definition Audio (with eight independent channels) and 802.11g wireless support. The fact that Asus' wireless chip is built onto the board itself saves a PCI slot, but also detracts from its portability.

In usual Asus style, the board's software bundle is one of the most tempting aspects of the entire package, consisting of InterVideo's WinDVD Suite that bundles WinDVD Platinum 5, WinDVD Creator Platinum 2 and WinRip 2. Similarly, the BIOS is replete with copious tweaking options, which will naturally gain the attention of the enthusiast crowd.

The board's performance exceeded our expectations, thanks to its native support for DDR2 771 memory coupled with its ability to run this memory at extremely low timings. Similarly, no stability or layout issues were encountered during testing, which is always great to see.

If you're looking to make the move to a Socket 775 Pentium 4 processor sometime in the near future, you can't go wrong with the Asus P5AD2-E. That is, if you can afford to pay for it!

PC GAMES ADDICT

PERFORMANCE 94%
VALUE 80%

90%

›Prime performance comes at a price

Seeing double

SITECOM USB 2.0 VGA ADAPTER $140

Anyware: www.anyware.com.au (02) 9387 5788

As the name implies, the Sitecom USB 2.0 to VGA adapter enables users to connect an extra monitor to any computer with a USB port, regardless of whether or not your video card supports a dual-monitor setup. However, since most graphics cards released in the past two years have dual-monitor capabilities built in, this gadget is undoubtedly redundant for most PCGA readers.

Additionally, on the odd chance that your card doesn't possess dual monitor inputs, purchasing an old PCI-based graphics card is a far cheaper alternative to spending $140 on this adapter. Albeit, an additional graphics card doesn't offer anywhere near the level of portability boasted by this compact adapter, but this still doesn't justify the added expense considering that portability isn't of integral importance in a dual-monitor setup.

Although this gadget would have been extremely useful three years ago, the plethora of features existent on current graphics chipsets coupled with the array of inexpensive PCI-based cards that can be found on Ebay makes this product completely redundant these days.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 60%
VALUE 30%
42%
›Get with the times, Sitecom!

See? No wires!

A4TECH BATTERY FREE 3D WHEEL MOUSE $45

Anyware: www.anyware.com.au (02) 9387 5788

The mouse, conceived by Douglas Englebart at the Stanford Research institute in 1964, has evolved so much (both in its design and technical aspects) that until now further innovation was seen as impossible. Thankfully, A4Tech have proven us all wrong with its release of the first ever battery-free wireless optical mouse. This is achieved through a RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) USB mouse pad, which comes bundled with the mouse itself and effectively eliminates the need to draw power from batteries. However, the fact that the mouse must be used in conjunction with said mouse pad completely negates any benefits gained from using a wireless mouse in the first place. Furthermore, from a gamer's perspective, while the mouse is quite responsive and comfortable to use, the pad - at 16cm in width - is so small that any form of gaming quickly provies frustrating, particularly in FPS titles.

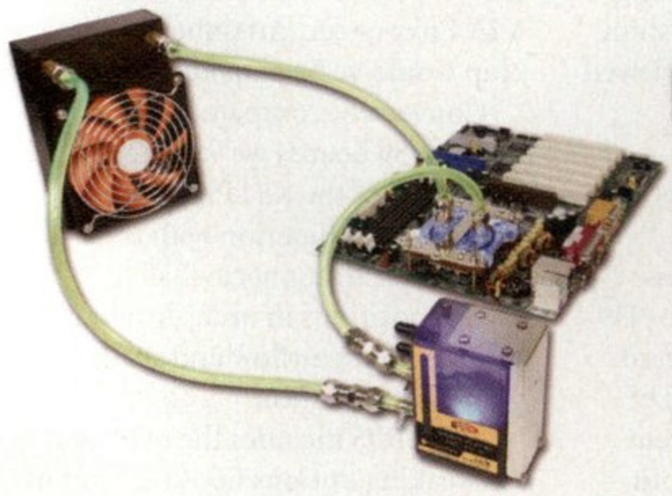
A4Tech gets a pat on the back for driving innovation, but we can't help but read this as innovation for innovation's sake rather than something genuinely useful.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 60%
VALUE 70%
65%
›Another day, another gimmick

Cold as ice

THERMALTAKE BIGWATER LIQUID COOLING SYSTEM $199

PCCaseGear: www.pccasegear.com.au (03) 9584 7266



With modern CPUs dissipating in excess of 100W worth of heat, the need for extreme cooling solutions is now more apparent than ever before. Water-cooling is one such solution that's well worth investigating.

Unlike its Aquarius line, Thermaltake's Bigwater is an internal system, complete with a huge 12cm radiator (cooled by a 120mm fan), an all copper, universal waterblock for maximum heat dissipation, a 12V water pump, all necessary tubing and finally, coolant to prevent freezing and/or rusting - basically everything you'll need to build your own water-cooled rig.

The aforementioned large radiator fan is capable of providing the same level of airflow as a smaller fan but with a lower RPM, resulting in decreased noise levels, while the pump - moving 120 litres of water per hour - is extremely efficient as well. This translates into performance that cannot be matched by an air-cooling solution. Our 2.4GHz Pentium 4 processor that we overclocked to 3.2GHz at 1.875 volts ran, under load, at an unbelievably low temperature of 44 degrees Celsius - around 30 degrees lower than Intel's stock heatsink/fan unit under identical circumstances.

PCGAMES ADDICT GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

As with any extreme cooling solution, installation takes some time and guidance to master, and particularly with water-cooling, it's imperative that you test the system outside of your machine first on the odd chance that the tubing provided has sprung a leak. Don't fret; however, as ThermalTake's included documentation is capable of walking even the most novice computer user through the entire process without too many traumas.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 90%
VALUE 93%
92%
›Overclockers rejoice salvation has arrived!

they say the eyes are
the window to the soul

Killzone ™ Copyright 2003 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Guerrilla. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Killzone is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. All rights reserved. KSPS5782

CAN YOU STOP THE UNSTOPPABLE?

WWW.KILLZONEPS2.COM

fun, anyone?

PlayStation 2

SERVICE PACK 2 CHECK UP

Microsoft's Windows XP update is upon us. What's broken?

BY JON HICKS & ASHER MOSES

DO IT... NOW!

Install SP2

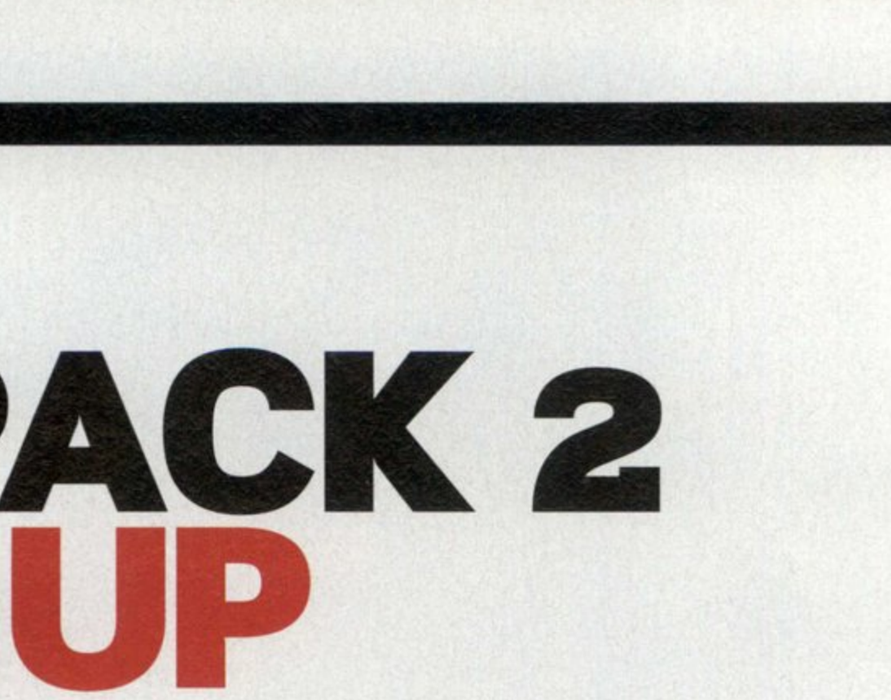
INSTALLATION

PROBLEM Service Pack 2 won't install
REMEDY Forcibly remove it and reinstall
RESULT You are now only vulnerable to next-generation flaws, rather than old ones

Slotting the Windows XP Service Pack 2 update disc into your PC may cause a few side-effects on some systems, mostly due to conflicts with existing programs. If the installation fails, or your PC starts booting into a blank screen or endless loop, then you need to throw your hands to the heavens and uninstall and try again. System Restore is best for this (go into Safe Mode, then Start > All Programs > Accessories > System Tools > System Restore) but if you can't even get your PC to load, you'll need to boot from the XP install CD. Set your CD drive as the first boot device in the BIOS, press any key when prompted, and then press R to launch the Recovery Console. Type cd $NtServicePackUninstall$\ Spuninst [enter] batch spuninst.txt [enter], and then exit [enter]. This should enable you to boot into Windows XP, from where you can go to Start > Run, type cmd [enter] and then cd C:\Windows/$NtServicePack Uninstall$\Spuninst, assuming C:\windows is your Windows directory. Finally, type spuninst.exe and hit Enter to start the uninstallation process.

ON THE DISC Upgrade your games machine with our hand-picked selection of apps and utilities > Toolkit

That should get you in a position to try again. If you're still having problems, try purging it of all background processes by running spyware and anti-virus scans, updating and/or disabling anti-virus and firewall software, and removing as many devices and device drivers as you can. If you get an "Unable to Locate Component" error, try inserting your Windows XP install disc. SP2 also doesn't play well with programs that have altered Windows settings, so roll back custom boot screens, etc to the default setting.



Be it shift or screen, blue is rarely good news.

If it installs fine but breaks things, other options present themselves. Non-functioning USB ports seem to be a favourite, but you should be able to fix them by replacing the drivers from your motherboard manufacturer's website. Random crashes and notices of access violations can be caused by the new DEP feature – see Too Embarrassed to Ask for an explanation and a possible fix. The list of other potential problems is only fractionally shorter than the Doomsday Book, so it's easiest to resort to a repair installation: boot from the XP CD, go through to Setup, and you should be presented with a Repair option after you've OK'd the license agreement. This will blank your XP installation, while leaving your files intact.

UTILITY OF THE MONTH

JOY TOKEY
Few games bar flight sims have much cause to use a joystick these days – all has fallen under the all-consuming sway of the joypad. However, joysticks are by far the best peripheral for old-school arcade shootery, and can be brought out of retirement for even the most amateurish Flash creation thanks to JoyToKey. As the name might suggest, it transforms joystick input to keyboard presses, so you can even use it for data entry if you're particularly strange and unnatural. Get it from **http://hp.vector.co.jp/authors/VA016823/joytokey/english.html.**

DO IT... THIS WEEKEND!

Configure the firewall

FIREWALL FIX

PROBLEM SP2 prevents online play
REMEDY Investigate the firewall and unblock ports as required
RESULT Peaceful desktop operation and uninterrupted smackdown

If you didn't have a firewall in place when you installed SP2, then you do now: the new Windows Firewall is beefier than the old Internet Connection Firewall and is now turned on by default. It's still a bit lame compared to third-party jobs – I'd advise replacing it with something like ZoneAlarm – but it is better than an open PC for the world to see. It isn't, however, helpful for online gaming, so you may find an adjustment is in order.

If you're having problems with a previously reliable third-party firewall, make sure that the Windows Firewall is switched off, as the two will conflict – go to Windows Firewall in the Control Panel and check Off. If you want to stick with it but get your games working, leave it on and choose Exceptions > Add Program. Pick the game from the list or click Browse to locate it on your hard drive, hit OK to add it to the list, and check the box next to it to allow access.

UT2003 is one game you might have to open ports for.

If this doesn't work, then you can open the specific ports the game needs to operate. With luck, these will be listed in the manual or Readme file, and you can click Exceptions > Add Port to include them. If you can't find them listed, deduction is called for. If you can run the game and then get back into Windows by using [Alt] + [Tab] or by pressing the Windows key, and go to Start > Run > cmd. Type netstat -ano > netstat.txt [enter] and tasklist > tasklist.txt [enter] and you'll get two text files. Cross-reference the PID number for the game executable in tasklist.txt with the port being listened to in netstat.txt – it's after the colon in the IP address – note if it's TCP or UDP, and you're then able to add the port back in the Exceptions list.

Essential Tech Tips

POST SUBJECT
Setup a 3-way wired LAN

Switches are worshipped as gods by some primitive cultures.

Networking two computers is as simple as ensuring that there's a network card in both machines and a cross-over cable to link the two. However, when an extra computer is added into the equation, the multitude of methods that can be used to create such a network can make the process more daunting.

1. Method The first thing you'll need to consider is how you're actually going to setup the machines to communicate with each other. While there are copious methods one can adopt to achieve this, the two most common and effective solutions are through a router or a switch. On a switched network, the computer that's physically connected to the internet plugs into the switch's uplink port, and the other two machines are hooked up to any of the other ports. However, a significant disadvantage to using this method is that all other users are relying on the machine hosting the internet connection to be active at all times – when it's turned off, so is your internet. Thus, a router performs very similar tasks to a switch, however, the 'routing' of Internet traffic to other computers on your network is not done by a host machine, but by the router itself. In addition, since most routers come with a built-in hardware firewall, a router is a much safer option than a switched network. Since we're only considering three machines, a four port router is more than enough.

2. Cabling If you've previously had two PCs connected to one another via a cross-over cable, additional cabling will need to be purchased for connection to the switch/router. While a crossover cable can still be used to connect your host PC/modem to the switch/router, all other PCs must be connected using a 'straight-through' cable. These can be purchased from any electronics vendor/PC retailer with costs varying depending on length.

3. Software Configuration Software Configuration – Once all of the computers are hooked up using your method of choice, you'll need to configure Windows to detect the network. To do this, head over to Control Panel > Network Connections and enter the 'Properties' menu of 'Local Area Connection'. Next select Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) and hit properties again, and assign an IP address, subnet mask and default gateway to each machine. For a home-network the most common IP path is 192.168.0.x, so give each PC a unique IP (e.g. 192.168.0.1 and so on), with a common subnet mask of 255.255.255.0 and a common default gateway/primary DNS which is either the IP of the machine that's hosting the internet connection or the IP of the router itself (check the router's manual if you don't know it).switch, the others linking the second and third to the switch.

4. Bandwidth Another issue worth considering when sharing a network/internet connection between three computers is the fact that, if all three computers are accessing the Internet at the same time, bandwidth (read: speed) is effectively divided by three for each user. However, this is obviously not the case if the other users aren't performing Internet-related tasks.

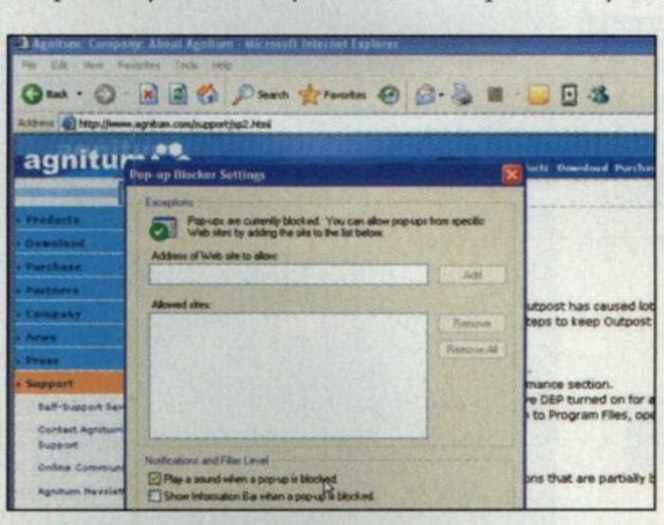
DO IT... THIS MONTH!

SILENCE

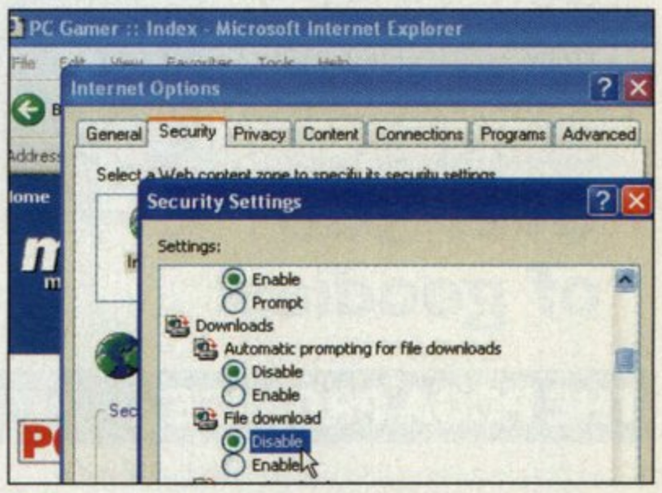
PROBLEM SP2 blocks everything, then whinges like a spurned grandmother whenever you use your PC.
REMEDY Disable all the warning prompts
RESULT Hassle-free, if not enormously safe, PC operation

Adjust your new settings

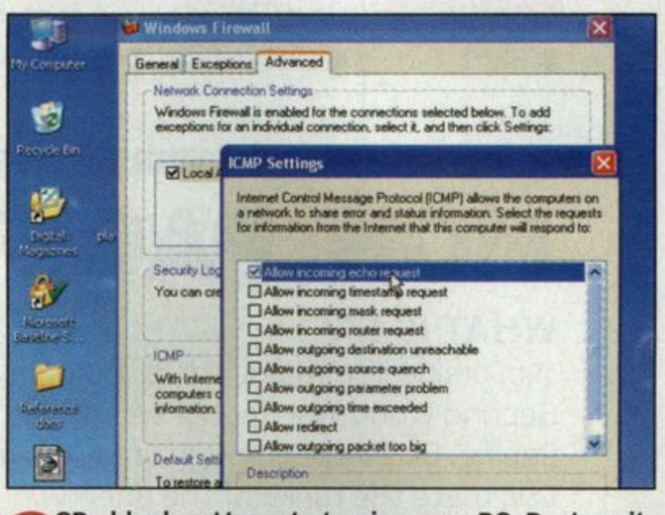
So, you've got SP2 installed and running perfectly? Hooray – now you can experience the daily irritation of it telling you how desperately insecure your PC is. What it really, really wants is for you to switch on Automatic Updates, which is actually a very good idea, but if you're low on bandwidth mere notification is easier. Go to Start > Control Panel > Security Center, click on the Automatic Updates link at the bottom of the window, and check the "Notify me..." option. If you really want to live dangerously you can opt for "Turn off Automatic Updates". You can disable the warning balloons for this and the other security checks by going back into the main Security Center window and clicking "Change the way Security Center alerts me." See below to disable other irritations, but beware of the security risks if you do…



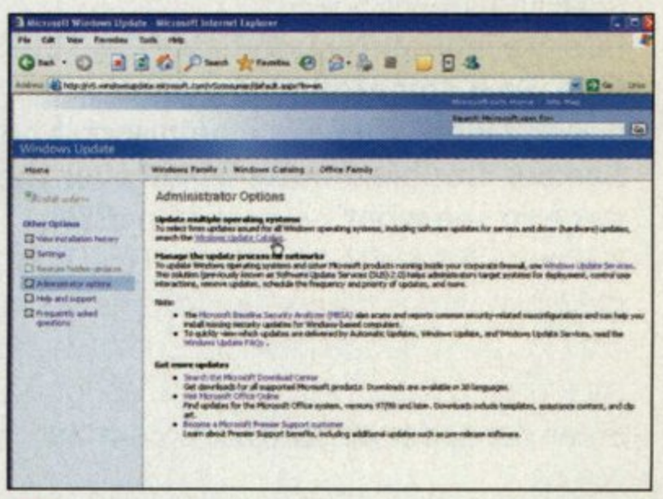
1 Disable blocker warnings by going to Tools > Pop-Up Blocker > Pop-Up Blocker Settings. Allow pop-ups by typing in site name and clicking add, temporarily allow them by holding CTRL.



2 For content that fills your PC with spyware, go to Tools > Internet Options > Security, select Internet and click Custom Level. Enable, disable or prompt for ActiveX and program downloads.



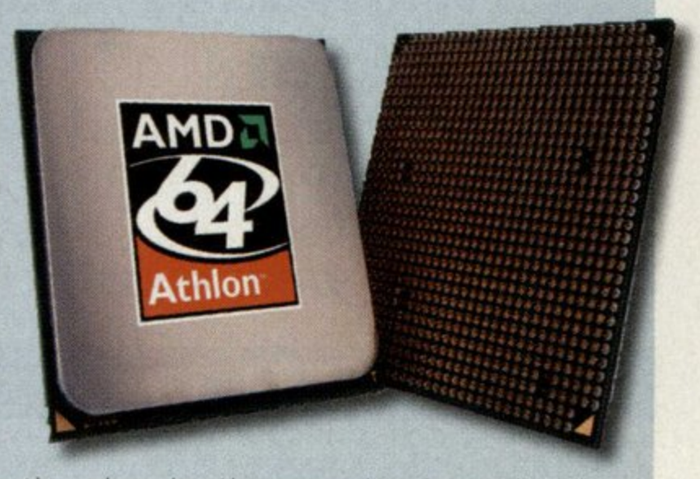
3 SP2 blocks attempts to ping your PC. Restore it to full visibility by going to Control Panel > Windows Firewall > Advanced > ICMP > Settings and checking 'Allow incoming echo request'.



4 The new Windows Update site has hidden the highly useful Update Catalog, but if you want to create your own set of Windows updates, go to Administrator Options > Windows Update Catalog.

TOO EMBARRASSED TO ASK...

"WHAT IS DEP?"



DEP, or Data Execution Prevention, labels areas of your PC's memory as storage-only so that malicious code can't be executed from it – thus preventing the famed buffer overflow, the entry point of many a virus. The first bit of bad news is that it's only supported by AMD 64 processors, and the second is that it doesn't agree with several programs and drivers. If you're getting STATUS_ACCESS_VIOLATION or DEP errors, you can disable it for the program in question by right-clicking My Computer, choosing Properties > Advanced, and then > Performance > Settings > Data Execution Prevention, choosing the second option and adding the offending program to the list. Alternatively, you can disable the whole thing by going to Startup and Recovery > Settings > Edit to bring up boot.ini, and changing the /NoExecute entry to /execute.

ON THE DISCS

Featuring

- **12** playable demos
- **14** massive mods
- **8** must-see movies
- **32** system-boosting tools and utilities
- **Over 5Gb of goodies!**

THE PCGA PROMISE

- We pack every disc with the best new PC entertainment every month. If you can't find an item you were expecting, it probably just missed our deadline and you can bet we'll have it on next issue's disc.
- **PCs are inherently unreliable. Sad but true. So if something on your disc doesn't work then we'll help sort it out. See our Troubleshooter guide over the page to see what help we can offer.**
- We scour the earth to bring you the finest playable demos, movies, mods and utilities that PC gaming can provide. But if we miss a trick then tell our Disc Editor all about it. Email **dan@derwenthoward.com.au**

DVD vs CD

1 DVD **6.12 CDS!**

The world is moving on and CDs can't keep up. Demos, movies and mods are bigger than ever and, inevitably, we can't fit everything on the ancient storage medium.

This issue, DVD-drive owners get an extra:

+ 9 playable demos
+ 4 movies (plus DIY movies)
+ 9 mods
+ 6 software tools
= 4.5GB of gaming guff!

NO DVD DRIVE?

- New games these days are becoming huge, and DVDs are the only only practical way to store some of these games. You'll NEED one.
- **Get a DVD drive. There's one for only $70 or so at a hardware vendor near you.**

DVD

NFS: UNDERGROUND 2

WHAT IS IT?

The feverishly-anticipated sequel to last year's romp through the neon-lit world of tuned cars. This demo features a free roam through part of the city but the real meat lies with the adrenaline-pumping circuit and drift races. There's even an online option.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Beat a time of 3.10 on the City Hall circuit Quick Race.

DEMO GOALS

Explore the city and win both the circuit and drift challenges.

That 'Player 1' seems to crop up everywhere!

PERFORMANCE TIPS

- The harder you drive, the more rewards *NFS Underground 2* will bestow upon you. Here are a few examples of how to gain precious nitros.
- Use powerslides on the tougher corners. They're the smartest way to get around the course.
- Discover the customary shortcuts – You'll cut minutes off your times. Tip: Keep an eye out for shiny paved surfaces – chances are they herald a detour.
- Hassle your opponents whenever possible. Their misery is your ticket to winning.
- Dodge oncoming civilian traffic by driving on the wrong side of the road. It'll give you a much-needed speed boost.
- In Explore mode, head down to the car shop for some beefed-up versions of your bog-standard Nissan 350Z.
- *NFS* asks a lot of your 3D card. If it isn't that hot a card, lower resolution with higher detail always looks better.

README

Developer In-house
Publisher Electronic Arts **Requires** 933MHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb DX9 3D card

CONTROLS **Left Cursor** steer left ■ **Right Cursor** steer right ■ **Up Cursor** throttle ■ **Down Cursor** reverse ■ **Shift** shift up ■ **Ctrl** shift down ■ **Space** handbrake ■ **Alt** nitro

DVD

MOH: PACIFIC ASSAULT

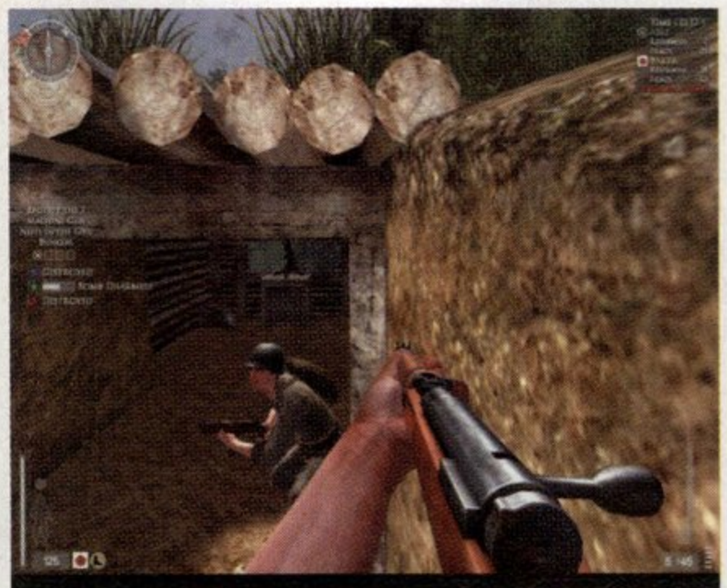
WHAT IS IT?

Join online comrades in this multiplayer Second World War sequel set in the Pacific. Scramble through undergrowth! Decimate the ranks of the enemy! Smack people in the face with your rifle butt!

DEMO CHALLENGE
Win playing as the Allied forces but without an Engineer.

DEMO GOALS

Free-for-alls and team deathmatches should need no introduction but there's also a team mission available. The Allies must secure the Axis river observation post, infiltrate the bunker and destroy the machine guns, secure the ammo depot, commandeer the Japanese radio and transmit co-ordinates to their artillery to order a strike. The Japanese goal is to stop the Americans in their tracks.


If you need a medic, you can call him by pressing 'H'.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

- Stay close to your platoon, especially the medic. The Japanese can spread further as long as they leave a last man at base.
- The Americans should use explosives to take out the machine gun emplacements.
- Make use of the plentiful undergrowth to snipe away at your opponents.
- If at first you don't find a non-laggy server, keep plugging away, they are out there.
- The stars on the compass denote the target, the red cross denotes your medic and the other symbols represent your elite squad.
- Don't break cover unless you know where you are heading. The open is dangerous.

README

Developer In-house
Publisher Electronic Arts **Requires** 1.5GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card

CONTROLS **W,A,S,D** movement ■ **Mouse** look ■ **Spacebar** stance up ■ **Left Ctrl** stance down ■ **Right Mouse** melee attack ■ **F** use ■ **Left Mouse** fire/use ■ **Mousewheel** cycle weapons ■ **R** reload

CD

ALEXANDER

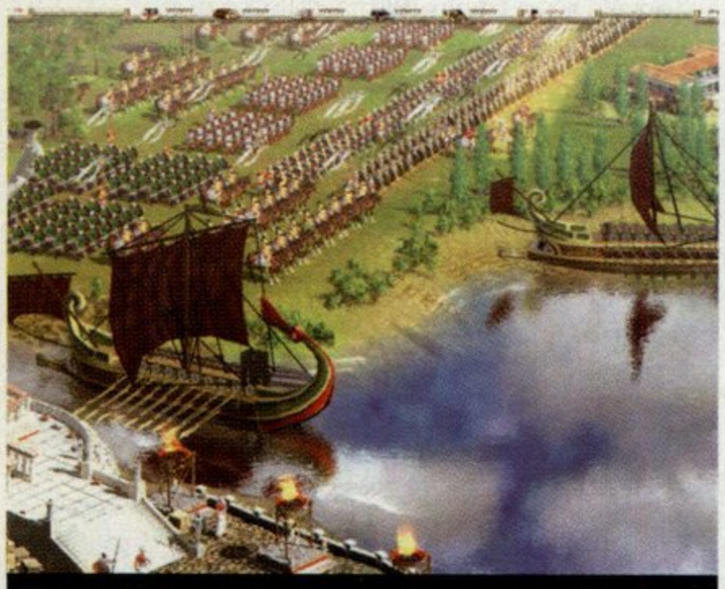
WHAT IS IT?

We could say that it's another movie-license tie-in, but that would be selling it short. Alexander has obvious been in development for some time, and it plays like a strange blend between *Rome: Total War* and *Praetorians* - just with a Macedonian flavour.

DEMO GOALS

You can skirmish away to your heart's content in this RTS game, but there's also a campaign mission to sink your teeth into. First, save the villagers under attack from rebels, then lead them to your first settlement, which you must then use as a base to finish the bandit lords off.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Build every possible unit type and building before the end of the demo level



"Now form an orderly queue and get on board!"

PERFORMANCE TIPS

› Keep cranking out troops, because numbers REALLY matter in Alexander. When you click to build a unit, you're actually selecting to keep producing them, not just a single troop.

› Naturally, cranking out so many units will put a constant drain on your resources. If you're finding yourself unable to create a building or a troop type, check to see what units you're devoting resources to.

› Create a mix of unit types. There is no universally powerful unit in this game.

› Think about how you combine your forces. Make sure you put your infantry down front, and your missile units behind them for the most effective strategies.

README

Developer Ubisoft
Publisher Ubisoft **Requires** 1.5GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card

CONTROLS **Left Mouse** select ■ **F8** Open Help Menu ■ **Right Mouse** Move/Attack ■ **Arrow keys** pan camera ■ **Hold Right Mouse and drag** Move units, facing direction of 'drag'

DVD

FLATOUT

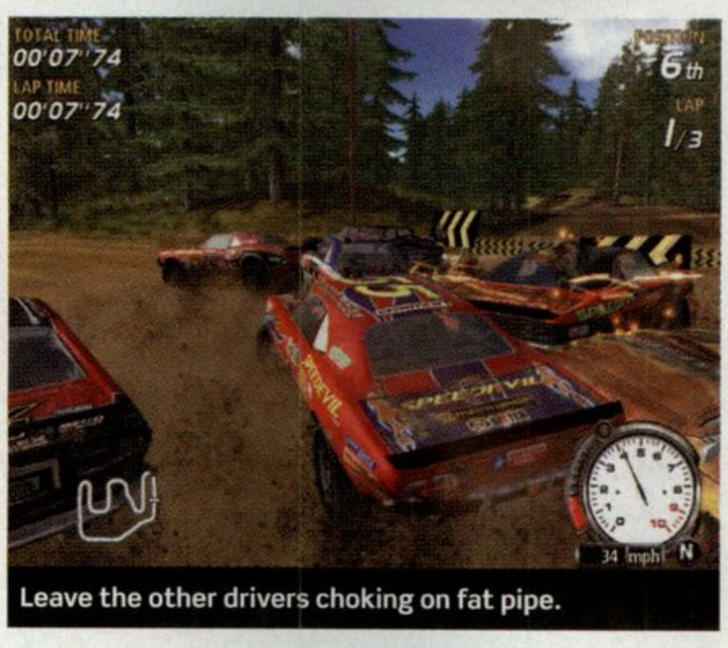
WHAT IS IT?

A driving game designed around a stomach-wrenching physics engine. Your plucky driver (well, foolhardy, actually, where *is* his helmet?) can be thrown from his souped-up motor if you crash with the speed of the maniac. Also, in the spirit of an Olympic year, the game features a series of amusing field events to complement the tracks.

DEMO GOALS

Burn around Finchley Forest, a woodland rally-type course, then race a merry jig on tarmac in the Fairgrass Cup. Finally, launch our daredevil through the windscreen to achieve the highest jump possible at the Grand Slam Stadium. At least that explains why he never wears a seatbelt.

DEMO CHALLENGE
See if you can manage more than 280m in the high jump.



Leave the other drivers choking on fat pipe.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

› Crashes and scrapes add to your car's Nitro reserve. Flying through flimsy barriers and jostling with your opponents is a good way to do this. Launching your car into a lorry (who parked them there anyway? Don't they know there's a race on?) is not, because although you will max out your Nitro, it'll barely be enough to bring you back level with the pack.

› Shortcuts are not allowed, despite an inviting ramp in Finchley Forest. Conversely, do take the route under the juggernaut on the tarmac track. It isn't much faster, but it is a lot cooler.

› If things go wrong but you haven't actually crashed, you can often return the car to the middle of the track, even if the 'reset' message isn't displayed.

README

Developer Bugbear Entertainment
Publisher Empire Interactive **Requires** 1.5GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card

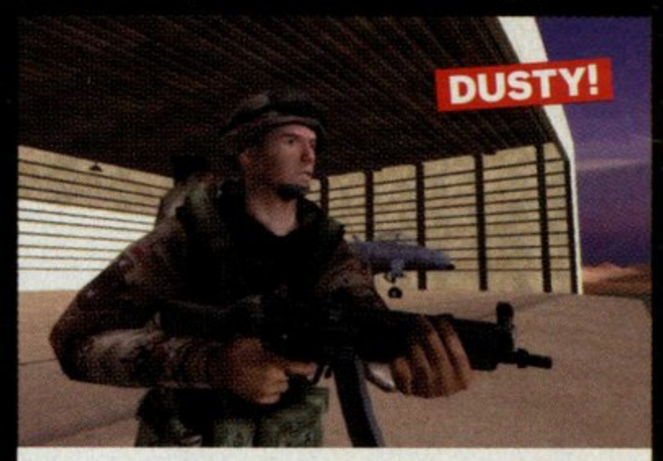
CONTROLS **Cursor Keys** steer, accelerate, brake ■ **Space** handbrake ■ **R** reset car ■ **Ctrl** nitro ■ **C** camera ■ **Esc** pause ■ **Enter** start

DISC EXTRAS

More than just demos...

+14 mods

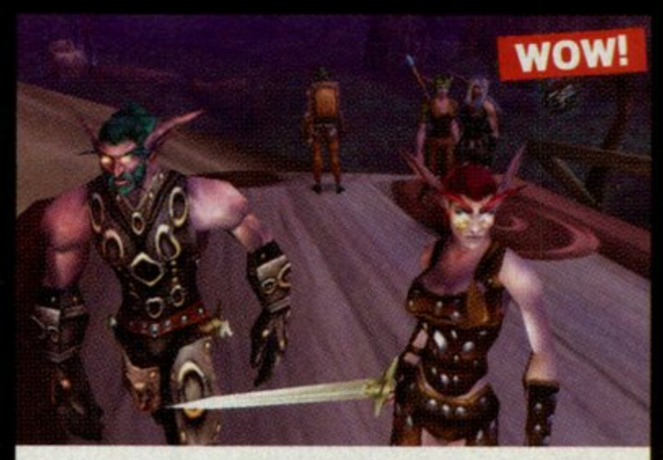
Hot new *Doom 3* mods, award-winning *UT2004* mods from the MSU competition, plus *Max Payne 2*, and *Battlefield 1942*!



BATTLEFIELD 1942: *Desert Combat* is finished!

+8 movies

Not as many as usual thanks to large demo and mod files, but eye-candy enough with *World of Warcraft*, *Matrix Online* and more.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: Trailer of our cover game

+9 Galleries

Screenshots of some of the best upcomging and recently released games for your viewing pleaseure: WoW, Oblivion, Guild Wars

ELDER SCROLLS - OBLIVION: Morrowind's ugly!

+Patches

› **The largest and latest fixes for you: *Dawn of War, Richard Burns Rally, Joint Operations, Men of Valor, more***

+Extra features

› GALLERIES – Bonus screenshots
› D-I-Y GOODIES - Accompanying this month's D-I-Y on Doom 3 map making is a series of movie files that shows you how to get end results by literally going through menus and doing it all in front of your eyes. Seeing is believing apparently...
› SHAREWARE DEMOS – *Four 'freebies'*

See the back of your box for full disc contents.

Disc page contents refer to DVD edition. CD contents restricted by size.

THE TOOLKIT

Essential tools and apps

Game apps

Match-making ..... X-Fire
Server browser ..... All-Seeing Eye
Voice communicator ..... Skype
Chat software ..... Trillian
Screen grabber ..... IrfanView
Emulation ..... Dosbox, ScummVM
Demo viewer ..... Seismovision
Video capture ..... FRAPS

Performance

Download manager ..... BitTornado
Uninstaller ..... EasyUninstall 6
Video card driver ..... Radeon, nVidia
System monitor .. Motherboard Monitor

Security

Anti-spam ..... Spybot Search & Destroy
Anti-spyware ..... AdAware
Anti-popup ..... Coolweb Shredder
Firewall ..... Zone Alarm

Media Management

File compressor ..... WinRar
Picture viewer ..... IrfanView
PDF viewer ..... Acrobat Reader
Web browser ..... Mozilla Firefox
FTP client ..... Filezilla
Email client ..... Mozilla Thunderbird
Music player ..... WinAmp
Movie player ..... Media Player Classic
Movie codec ..... DivX
Picture manipulation ... Paint Shop Pro 8

NOTE: *PSP8* is the trial version only.

TROUBLE SHOOTER

Is your coverdisc playing up? Help is at hand

1 If the menu program does not automatically start, the autorun feature may be disabled on your PC. Go to the START/RUN command on the task-bar and type D:\IERUNNER.EXE or D:\MENU\INDEX.HTM (where D is the drive letter).

2 For problems with an individual demo or application, refer to the Help section on the disc. Also ensure your drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.

3 If your disc is defective then return it to the address below, along with a description of the fault and an SAE:
Disc Department, PC Games Addict, Reply Paid 1035, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355

4 As soon as we discover issues with programs on the disc, we will post solutions on the **Disc Support forum**. Check here to see if there's a quick fix:
http://forums.derwenthoward.com.au/viewforum.php?f=5

We can only provide assistance with technical problems *directly* related to our coverdiscs. The PCGA discs have been thoroughly tested and certified 'virus free', but we recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on ANY software before running it. Derwent Howard Pty Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system which may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them.

DVD

MEN OF VALOR

WHAT IS IT?

Yet more jungle warfare, this time joining the US Army in the hunt for Ho Chi Minh and his Commie cronies. Tense first-person action in a lethal, verdant environment.

DEMO GOALS

"If they run, they're VC. If they stand still, they're well-trained VC." Assist your squad in clearing a couple of villages then go and rescue that darned fool reporter who insisted on tagging along.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Complete the patrol without taking any hits.

You'll need eyes in the back of your head to survive.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

› Watch out for traps along the path. You don't want to end up skewered with bamboo spikes.

› You don't have a lot of ammo, especially considering your squad only seems to lend you passing support in firefights. Switch your gun to semi-automatic with the 'Alt' key, and rummage through the pockets of your fallen enemies to pick up extra munitions (and health canteens) by pressing and holding 'Space'. The other villagers won't take too kindly to such desecration, so make sure the area is clear first. The pile of Vietnamese bodies at the far end of the rope bridge is the best place.

› If shot, seek cover (or just hit 'V' to go prone), then hold down 'F' to stabilise your health meter with bandages.

› Take cover and use the precise aim mode to clear areas before advancing. You can often kill the enemy through just a tiny gap between buildings.

README

Developer 2015
Publisher Vivendi **Requires** 1.3 GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card

CONTROLS **W, A, S, D** movement ■ **Left Mouse** fire ■ **Middle Mouse** melee ■ **Right Mouse** precise aim ■ **C** crouch ■ **Mousewheel** cycle weapons ■ **V** prone ■ **F** bandage ■ **Space** use/search ■ **Q** quick grenade

DVD

H&D 2: SABRE SQUADRON

WHAT IS IT?

A single sprawling level of this strategic squad-based shooter. Control a crack team of World War II era soldiers as they perform acts of derring-do and cement their reputation as the Baddest Asses Ever.

DEMO GOALS

The Italian army are attempting to destroy a crucial bridge. Without it, Allied armour will be hard pressed to move forward. Who are you going to call? The Commandos, of course.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Complete the level without losing a member of your squad.

It'll take a while to get to grips with, but persevere

PERFORMANCE TIPS

› *Hidden & Dangerous 2* is a complex game so familiarity with all the controls is a must. Spend a little time reading the key bindings before jumping in.

› Squad control is tricky at first but hang in there; use numpad 0 to issue commands to the entire team and numpad 1, 2, 3 and 4 to issue individual commands.

› A direct assault on the Italian position would be suicide. There are alternative routes on either side of the bridge but keep your eye out for Axis troops who've had exactly the same idea.

› There are a lot of Allied soldiers hanging about, providing cover fire and generally making themselves useful. They're not just there for decoration so try and keep them alive – they'll be useful later on.

README

Developer Illusion Softworks
Publisher Gathering **Requires** 400MHz CPU, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card

CONTROLS **Mouse** camera ■ **Left Mouse** fire ■ **Keyboard Arrows** movement ■ **Right Mouse** zoom ■ **Home** climb ■ **Mousewheel** control speed ■ **Enter** reload ■ **Backspace** drop ■ **J** jump ■ **Right Ctrl** crouch

DVD

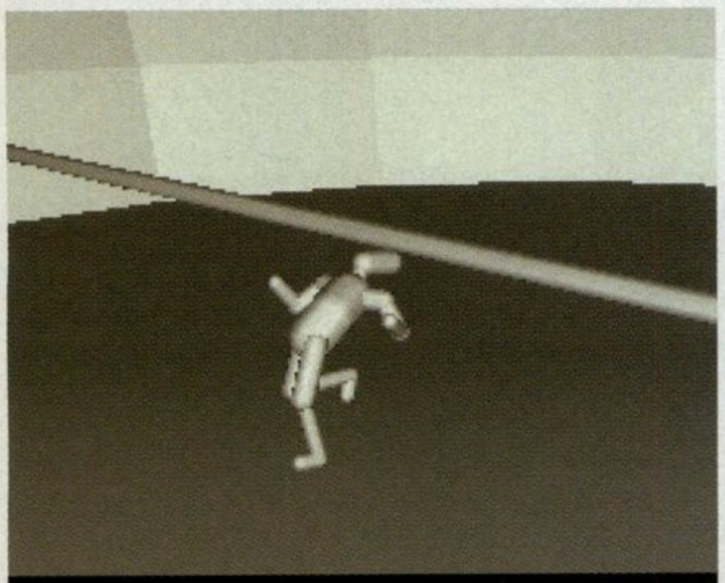
MEQON PHYSICS - NEW!

THE PITCH
Do all those things to the human body that you wanted to that the law forbids

WHAT IS IT?

This is the second time we've featured Meqon Physics. If you saw it before, you'll know why we featured it in the first place. If not, then think of it as a sandbox for those that want to play with crash test dummies to indulge in all their body-breaking sadistics fantasies and all that stuff that your parents assumed were a natural side effect of playing video games.

What this boils down to in practical terms are an assortment of physics demos that are far more amusing than they are scientific or educational - regardless how much of a maths boffin the dude who did this was. These include vehicle demos with tanks, race cars and a death-defying corckscrew stunt jump. Rigid body animations, character animations with all manner of rag-doll scenarios, and some technical demos that look lovely.



Meh, our editor Dan is much better at limbo than this

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Believe it or not Meqon physics is behind the limb-rending nastiness of *Duke Nukem Forever*. Never heard of it? It wouldn't surprise us, because it was so many years ago that the game was announced that a lot of today's gamers weren't on the scene. It may be the running joke of the industry, but at least we know that if it *does* come out, it'll have excellent rag-doll effects.

README

Developer Meqon
Publisher N/A (free!) **Requires** A really basic PC

CONTROLS **Left Mouse** Interact ■ **Arrow keys** Move in certain demos ■ **Escape** Back/Exit ■ **Space** Fire

A MAP MADE IN HEAVEN

For beautifully balanced biffo

› **GAME** *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*
› **MAPS** *Crystal TD, Ghost TD, ASFY TBlizzard's TD & Defending the Castle*

TOWER DEFENCE: The most popular *War3* maps.

BE YE A FORGER OF MAD MAPS?

Do you possess the deft touch of the creator? If so, and you'd like to see it included on our cover disc, email us at pcga@derwenthoward.com.au, with the subject line "MAPS", your map attached *, and details we should know about your creation.

* If attachments turn out to add up to a file size of over 3MB, let us know before sending them on, as there's no guarantee we will be able to include it. Naturally we'll endeavour to include what we can, and will credit anyone whose material we run.

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"STAY ON TARGET!"

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All magazine contents and gifts subject to change. Some gifts not available overseas.

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Worms: Forts
Pro Evolution Soccer 4
Children of the Nile

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Brothers in Arms
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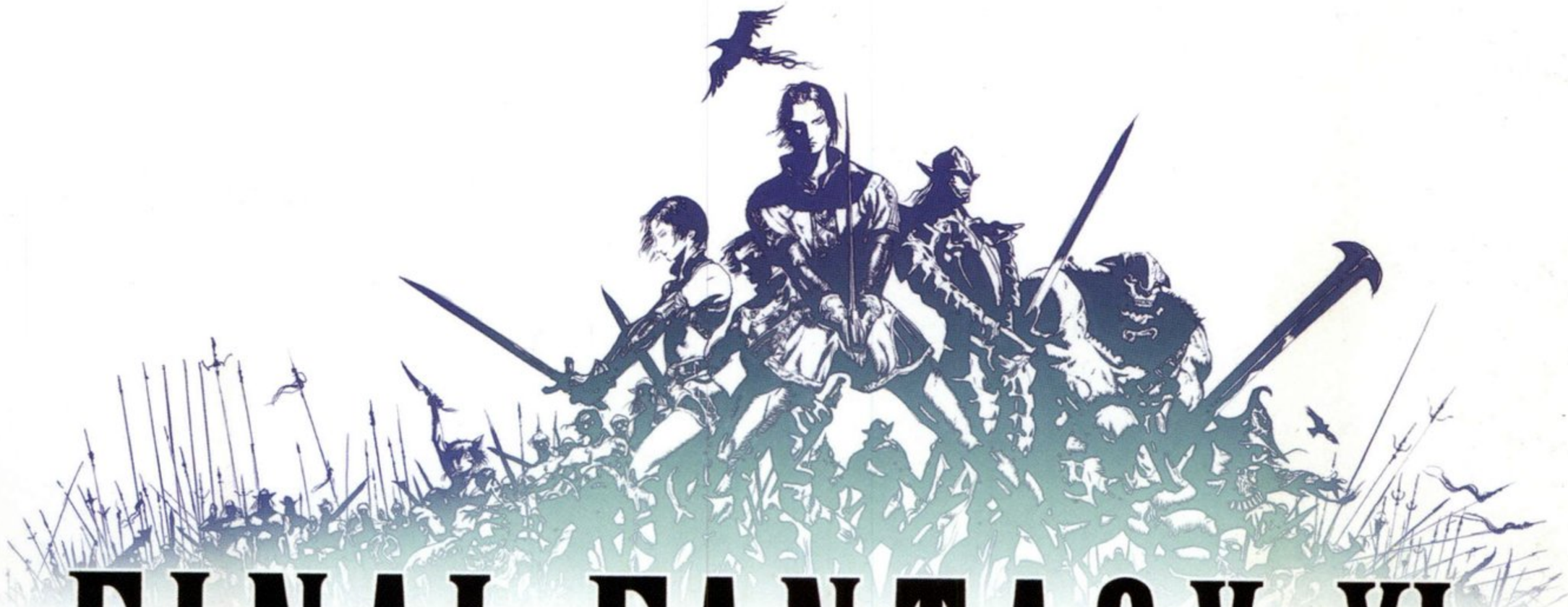

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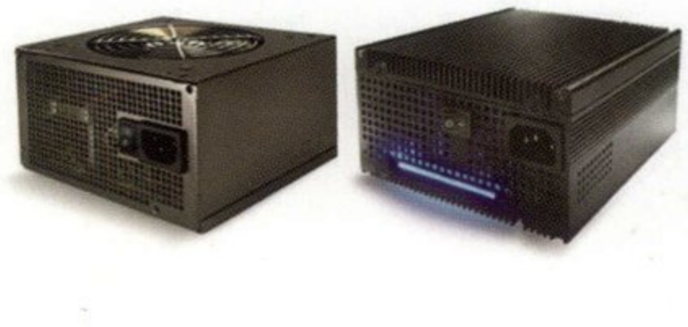

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